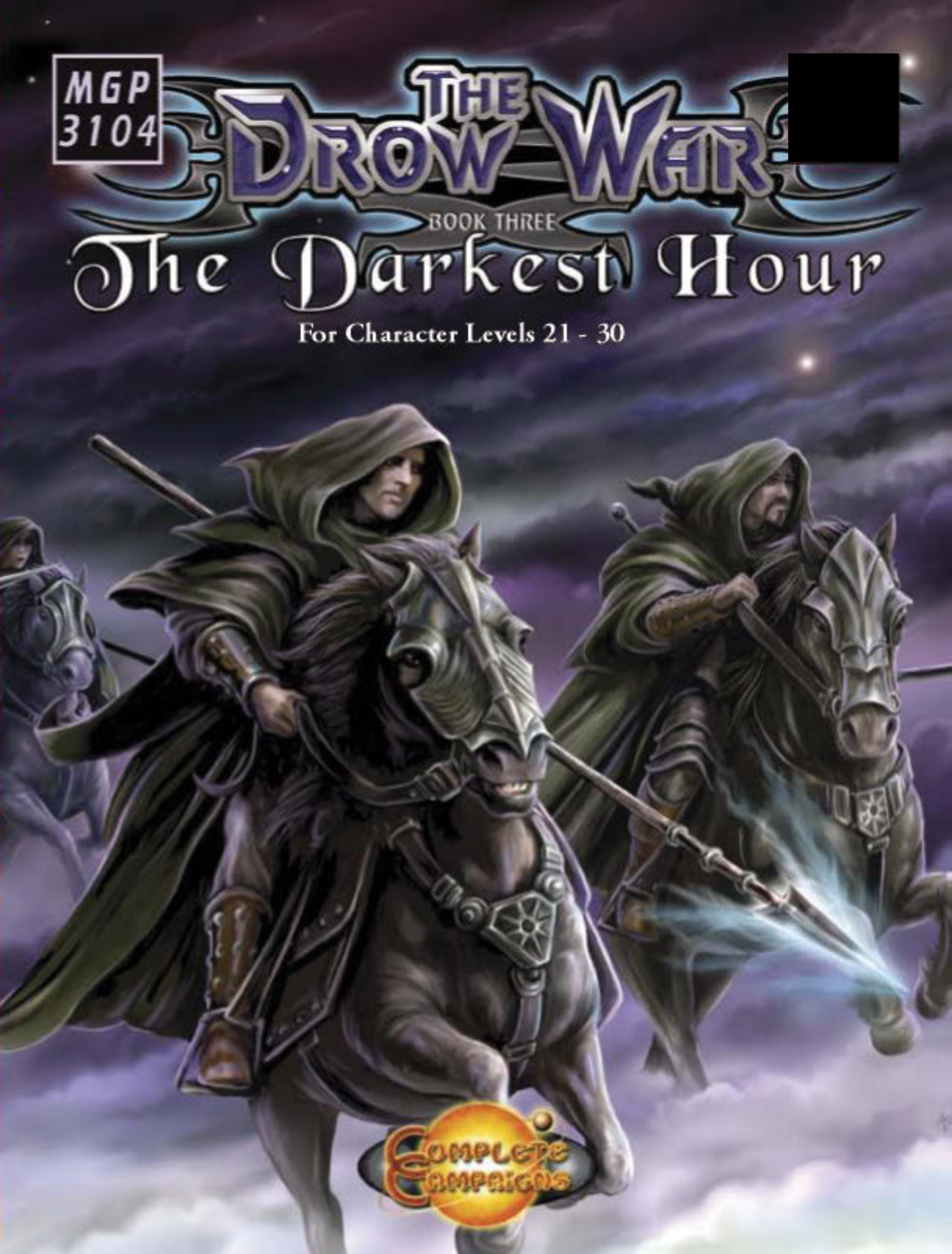
MGP 3104

The Drow War

BOOK THREE

The Darkest Hour

For Character Levels 21 - 30



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Introduction

Welcome to the final part of the *Drow War* campaign, *The Drow War, Book Three: The Darkest Hour.*

This adventure is epic in both senses of the word familiar to d20 enthusiasts. It takes the action out into the manifold planes of existence, pitting the Player Characters against no less a threat than the extinction of all life and the final triumph of darkness – stakes far beyond anything faced before. The adventuring takes place on a cosmic scale, with allies and adversaries to match.

The Player Characters move beyond the standard 20 levels of regular d20 and enter the realms of the epic rules. They come into possession of astounding new magical items, learn feats and spells that outshine the heroes of legend and face down foes that cause entire civilisations to tremble.

The action begins on the world of Ashfar, where the peace forged in the aftermath of the Player Characters' apparent victory at the end of the last book has now been broken. Something is causing the barriers between worlds to collapse, smashing plane into plane, opening rifts through which atrocious fiends can step into the ordinary world and cause chaos. No hero can let this happen without acting against it, and on this world and others, armour is donned and swords are drawn.

Even former enemies recognise the threat. The Player Characters must deal with shocking revelations concerning an old foe who may well prove to be new friend. Is it written in the heavens that the Starborn and the drow must always be opposed or can the dark ones truly change? Can the olive branch be accepted or is this just another trick? There is no easy way to decide.

In the haven of a dead god's skull, the most secure and yet the most isolated place in the many planes, the Assembly meets to investigate the fate of the worlds. Faced with a gathering of strange and sinister individuals from across the planes, the Player Characters must choose their allies well. First impressions may well be misleading and in a place where everyone has an agenda, nobody wants to trust anyone if they can help it. Can this motley band possibly act together and prevent the coming catastrophe or will the Player Characters have to go it alone? Will the wiles of schemers entrap them, turning one against another until good seems bad and bad seems good, or will they see through the manipulations and deceptions?

With the debris of shattered worlds serving as incontestable proof that whole planes have already been destroyed, the race is on to find the powers behind it. The dust is blown off old books and legends are ransacked for information. There are at least three items that can work this kind of magic, but which – if any – is the artefact responsible? There is only one way to find out.

Naturally there is all manner of trouble on the way. One cannot unearth an artefact without digging up a few guilty secrets too and even if the Player Characters act for the good of the whole universe, there are always those with their own selfish goals to pursue.

With persistence, luck and daring, the truth will finally begin to take shape. The quest leads through worlds of ocean and forest into fortresses where forbidden things creep in the dark and a half-insane princess breeds an army of the damned, through storms of chaos and under skies of impossible colours, and ultimately into the bowels of a machine the size of a nation, where the final secrets are revealed.

The Player Characters have saved one world; now they must save a million others. The fate of the cosmos rests in the hands of the Starborn and those they choose to ally with. Now more than ever, there is no certain outcome and defeat is always a possibility.

Only one thing is certain…

Whichever path the future takes, whichever side is victorious, this is the final battle of the Drow War.

The Beasts of Jasmal

How the Adventure Sections Work

For the Games Master's convenience, the various different sections of the adventure are divided into types. These are Summary, Location, Plot Event, Event, Non-Player Character, Information and Aftermath.

Summary: This is a brief summary of the adventure chapter.

Location: Entries of this type describe locations that the Player Characters may visit, whether or not there is anything happening there at the time. These can be resources such as taverns, or features of tactical importance, such as marshes or defensive walls. Note that a group's headquarters and its personnel are listed separately, as the group is not bound to one place. For example, a Rogues' Guild meetinghouse is a Location, while the guild itself is a Non-Player Character Group.

Plot Event: These entries describe occurrences that drive the main story forward. They happen irrespective of the Player Characters' actions. They are rare, because the Player Characters themselves advance the story for the most part. A plot event usually happens when the Player Characters reach an area for the first time or when they achieve some decisive objective. The Player Characters cannot avoid plot events, though they can always choose to delay reacting to them or to ignore them altogether.

Event: These events can be included at the Games Master's discretion as and when appropriate. They are not destined to happen but may do as a result of the Player Characters' actions. For example, an event may involve the imprisonment of the Player Characters after they decide to break into a building and are caught. Events frequently involve combat and are recommended for livening up a session when the Player Characters want something to fight or when they are running behind on experience.

Non-Player Character: Both individuals and groups are covered by this type of entry. Non-Player Characters have lives of their own, which they get on with whether the Player Characters are there to see it or not. If a character or monster is of more importance than just one encounter, it is described here; otherwise it is given an 'Event' entry.

Information: This entry type gives information that the Games Master needs to know and the Player Characters can find out. It is most commonly used for rumours and legends, such as can be found out by the use of the Gather Information skill or Bardic Knowledge checks.

Aftermath: This kind of entry details the various different ways the plot can unfold after a key decision has been made or a critical encounter passed. Aftermath entries include information on experience point bonuses, character rewards, victory points and the fates of the Non-Player Characters involved.

A Note on Awarding Experience

The chapters in this book are structured so that each should give the Player Characters approximately one level of experience by the time they finish it. However, epic levels are notoriously difficult to calibrate. The variety of available options means that the Player Characters may at times achieve their goals without engaging with, much less 'defeating', any of the opponents in their path.

The most important aim of each adventure is to provide an enjoyable and challenging story. If the Player Characters reach the end of an adventure that has seriously challenged them but have not earned enough experience to advance, then we recommend that the Games Master simply give them a story award sufficient to top up their experience to the next level.

Signature Items

The Player Characters will most likely have the signature items they gained in *Book One*. The following table details signature item progression for epic levels.

Character Level	Item Bonus Points	Maximum Enhancement Bonus
21	+11	+6
22	+11	+6
23	+12	+6
24	+12	+6
25	+13	+7
26	+13	+7
27	+14	+7
28	+14	+7
29	+15	+8
30	+15	+8

What Has Gone Before

The Player Characters are no ordinary heroes. They are the Starborn, a group of legendary warriors who arise in new minds and bodies once every thousand years to face the threat of the rising Dark and its minions, the Host. Whether they are personally inclined towards good or evil or towards law or chaos, the Starborn stand for one thing above all: existence. The preservation of life itself comes before any personal moral outlook and the Dark is equally hostile to all save its champions.

At intervals of one thousand years, the forces of the Stars and the Dark come into conflict during a period called the Equinox of the Heroes. The outcome of this battle determines the fate of the world in the times to come, deciding whether the ordinary folk will live with the freedom to make their own decisions or be forced into blind compliance with the alien authority of the Dark. The primary representatives of the Dark, and the most likely creatures to become members of the Host, are the drow – or were until recently. The drow championing of the Dark has led to the battles fought at the Equinoxes being termed the Drow War, so historians tend to refer to the uprisings as the First, Second or Third Drow War. Since the First Drow War there has been an anchor point for the Dark on the Material Plane, a mass of black stone called the Abyssal Altar. While it remains here, the Dark can infuse itself into its minions, strengthening them and their magic and guiding them subtly against the foe.

The Last Drow War

If the Player Characters have already adventured through the first two books in this series, they are resting in the aftermath of the most recent of the Drow Wars, namely the Third. The events described below may have taken place differently in the Games Master's own campaign; this is the version most likely to have played out.

The archmage Rannirak, the twisted genius chosen to lead the drow against the upper world, came close to clinching victory. His massive Darkspears – metal spires filled with drow warriors and emanating domes of darkness that veiled whole cities – smashed upwards into the main cities of the strongest nation on Ashfar, the human-dominated land of Jehannum.

Rannirak's overconfidence proved his downfall, for he brought the Abyssal Altar to the chambers below the capital city in order to commune with the Dark more easily. He had no idea that this would allow the Starborn to reach the Abyssal Altar, destroy it and sever the Dark's only conduit into Ashfar. Without their tenebrous patron guiding them, the drow were left desolate and abandoned. The allied forces were able to overcome the demoralised enemy and win back Jehannum, bringing an end to the war.

One Year On

At the start of this campaign, one year has passed since the apparent ending of the last Drow War. The Player Characters have had plenty of downtime, which they can spend as they choose.

It is recommended that the Player Characters not start this campaign in the same place. With the end of the war, they no longer have a single common cause for which to fight. They can remain banded together if they choose but there is no real incentive for this, as there are no challenges that require a party structure. 20th level characters are far more likely to pursue their own agendas. It is a better opening to the campaign to begin with each character individually and give each his own introduction based on what he has been doing over the last year.

The choice of downtime activity determines how the adventure starts, so it is important to find out what each Player Character has been doing with his time. Some suitable options are given below.

Establishing a School: This is a very popular option, especially for monks and wizards. The Player Characters are 20th level and adventuring opportunities are few. There is simply nothing left on Ashfar that provides much of a challenge anymore, so raising a new generation of heroes is the natural thing to do. With the reputations they have earned, the Player Characters have no trouble attracting pupils. Any city that supported the allies would be honoured to have such an institution within its precincts – with the possible exception of a rogues' academy, unless it was of the kind that teaches the secrets of stealth and subterfuge to agents of the government.

Cleaning Up and Rebuilding: The Drow War caused untold damage to the cities of Ashfar's eastern continent, both the above-ground structures and the subterranean dominions of the dwarves. A dedicated craftsman could occupy his time by helping to raise the cities up again, rebuilding the fortifications and repairing collapsed houses. Gnomes and dwarves are well qualified to help here, as are spellcasting characters who can use such methods as *telekinesis*, *stone shape* and *transmute rock to mud* to help with the construction. If the Player Characters want to build themselves strongholds in any of the cities they have passed through, now is the time to do it, while old damaged buildings are being pulled down and new ones erected.

The damage to the cities' occupants has to be taken into account. The dead must be identified and given decent burials according to their faiths. Warriors missing in action and civilians who disappeared during the occupation may turn up alive, wounded or (most commonly) dead. Druids, clerics and paladins have their hands full caring for the people, helping them cope in the aftermath of war and ensuring that they do not lose their faith.

Ruling a Dominion: The Player Characters may have been awarded land in recognition of their deeds. Ruling over a piece of Chillhame, Caldraza, Jehannum or even the Topaz Dominions is no picnic. A governor faces challenges that range from monsters on the land to peasants demanding cheaper grain. It is one thing to be a hero on the battlefield but quite another to face the day-to-day challenge of living up to a title and a rank. Player Characters often aspire to rule their own domains but quickly find that it is not the life of privileged luxury they expect.

Entering Politics: The end of the Drow War does not mean sudden and enduring peace throughout all of Ashfar. The Halls of Concord on Xoth Sarandi have seen more use in the last month than in the previous seventy years. The times to come will need cool heads and persuasive voices.

A Player Character can take many roles as a politician. Characters may act as chairmen, keeping nations from going to war against each other and smoothing out diplomatic incidents. They might be the chosen representatives of a nation they have helped in the past. They could even be spies listening in on the private discussions that the heads of state have with one another.

In the previous volume of the *Drow War* series the countries of Kandang and Visk declared themselves for the drow while the Topaz Dominions and Svarth supported Jehannum. Even if the Player Characters were able to draw other nations into the fray, those initial decisions still reverberate in the aftermath of the war. Kandang and Visk are both strong nations greedy for more land. They have never been allied before but it is whispered that they are now working together towards a common goal. As representatives of nations, the Player Characters can keep a watchful eye on the debates in the Halls of Concord.

Hunting Down War Criminals: The drow had many sadistic, vile officers in their army who committed atrocities while Jehannum was occupied. Tales are told of torture, experimentation and sacrifice to the grim drow gods. Given the confusion and sudden shock that followed the destruction of the Abyssal Altar, many of the drow troops routed when the cities were recaptured. Not all of the officers escaped back underground and many went on the run, using magic to disguise themselves and entering new lives as mercenary commanders, professional assassins or magicians for hire.

Some Player Characters may wish to spend their time tracking these fugitives down and bringing them to justice. 'Justice' here may mean a formal trial or the more arbitrary justice of a summary execution. This is a good option for rangers, who can literally track fugitives who have fled into the wilderness. It is also suitable for rogues, as they can use their skills to infiltrate groups that drow war criminals might have joined and tap their underworld contacts to find out if there have been any sightings.

Private Study: Wizards and sorcerers who have built up personal fortunes (and enough of a reputation to be left well alone) often retreat to private strongholds to pursue their arcane research. They set aside time to develop new spells, craft magic items for their own use or for sale and even make constructs if they have acquired the necessary prerequisites. A legendary magician can become a figure of great terror in a community, even if he is good-aligned.

Going Back to Normal Life: A hero can always try to hang up his sword and return to the life he used to know. It is not easy, especially when the whole world is in one's debt; but some characters want nothing more than to be ordinary again. By raising a family, opening an inn or taking up a simple trade, characters can appreciate the home comforts

on which they have missed out over the last twenty levels of advancement.

Wandering: The classic choice for rangers and bards, wandering from place to place is the only possible option for some. They have spent the best parts of their lives on the road, venturing from town to dungeon to wilderness, and simply have no other way to live. Wandering the world allows them to see new sights, venture into places where nobody knows who they are and leave the bad memories behind. The gods sometimes guide them to places where they are needed, after which tales are told of the legends who came to town, set things right again and left with the wind.

The Fate of the Drow: Loyalists and Heretics

With the destruction of the Abyssal Altar, the drow are no longer the chosen race of a cosmic power. They had grown used to thinking of themselves as more than just a people who had gods; they were the servants of something even greater than a god. With that taken away from them, they have become a people divided and confused.

The surface world is now left in peace – or as much of a peace as it has ever known – while beneath the surface a new battle rages. The heads of the Ennead, the governing body of the drow, insist that the Dark will not abandon its people and demand that the drow remain loyal to it and to their gods. Hardcore loyalists based in Bahl-I-Shabran, the subterranean capital city of the drow, silence all dissents with black-glinting blades.

In the year that has passed since their defeat, the Ennead has not been idle. Its members have ventured into planes beyond Ashfar and sought a way to resume contact with the Dark. As this entity is outside of the ordered multiverse, it cannot easily reach its subjects without some form of eidolon or avatar. They are therefore obliged to travel to it.

The archmages and high priestesses of the Ennead have established a stronghold on a plane of rock tunnels where their dark magic waxes strong. A vessel called the Ebon Egg, which will in time become a form of Noah's Ark for the drow race, now bears them across the seas of outer chaos to the borderlands where the Dark broods eternally.

The Ennead now embarks on its most ambitious plan of all time. What it plans will bring an end to the thousand-year cycles in which light and dark challenge one another – a pattern that is played out on other worlds than Ashfar. Its project is nothing less than the dissolution of the established multiverse and its replacement by a new creation. The nine senior members of the Ennead will become deities under the command of She and Arkady, while a new race of drow (in whose veins the blood of gods will run) shall people this new matrix of worlds.

The Threnody: On the fringes of drow society, a new group is gathering power. This group of heretics believes that the Starborn were their saviours, not their adversaries. By destroying the Abyssal Altar, the Starborn broke the connection between the Dark and the drow race, freeing the dark elves to make their own destinies instead of being the pawns of a godlike force.

These freethinking radicals are calling themselves the Threnody in Velvet. Initially despised, they are steadily gaining more support, though the majority of drow still regard them as worse than outcasts. The Threnody's philosophy is one of individual freedom – a chaotic neutral outlook, in the language of conventional alignments. They are sick to their hearts of practicing evil and have seen too much slaughter to believe that there is any value in good. Having been immersed in hierarchical, rigid society from birth, they now favour eccentricity and self-expression.

Many members of the Threnody try to embody the opposite of the typical image of a drow. They wear bright colours, allow their hair to grow into unkempt dreadlocks instead of silken manes, carry human weapons instead of the hand crossbow and rapier, and associate with surface dwellers as much as they can.

The Threnody's objective is to make contact with the Starborn and their allies and to do what it can to help in the struggle to save the multiverse. Its members know that they have a long road to walk before they will be trusted.

Prologue: Bringing the Band Back Together

In the preliminary section, each Player Character has an encounter that segues into the main campaign. At least one of these should prompt the Player Characters to resume contact and reassemble the party. The Games Master should allocate a suitable event for each Player Character based on how much the player in question would be likely to enjoy the encounter.

Event: The Fugitive

This encounter is suitable for anyone who is actively hunting out drow left above ground after the end of the war. It can be adapted for characters who are roaming. The Games Master should read the following aloud:

When the war ended, there were many stories told of the inhuman treatment the drow visited upon their captives. The commanders were the worst. The troops merely did what they were told but the commanders always acted as if they had something to prove. They tried to outdo one another, thinking up new and ever more obscene torments to inflict upon their victims. Few could exceed Captain Histramil, who earned the nickname 'the fingernail collector'. Histramil was in charge of policing the slum districts of Vorgsbund, one of the first cities the drow seized. They say he

asked for the post. Human degradation was fascinating to him, especially when he could add to it.

If the rumours are correct, the squalid little inn ahead of you is where Captain Histramil is holing up, under a different name and wearing a different face. He was never captured at the end of the war. It is possible that he actually made it back to the underground realms and that this is a false trail, but you have to be sure.

The inn is a meagre two-storey affair in a far corner of Jehannum. The Player Character can prepare with any spells or prior scouting he wishes.

The Inn Staff: The inn is owned and run by Seddon Philips, a white-whiskered old lecher, and his daughter Melsa, who has the job of keeping her father sober as well as managing the inn's accounts. As far as the inn's owners are concerned, Histramil is an elven huntsman (possibly even a noble!) by the name of Grey Jankin. He pays for his room and board with good gold and tips generously. He has been here for three weeks now. When he first arrived he had a deep gash in his leg, which he explained as a wound from a wild boar that turned on him. He is resting up while his leg heals. They do not want him disturbed, as he is a valued guest. Lately he has been their *only* guest.

Histramil's Room: Histramil has a room at the top of the stairs. He is cautious and not about to let himself be caught easily. If the Player Character comes up to see him, he insists on heading back down to discuss things over drinks. This is so that he can come within easy reach of Seddon and Melsa and take them hostage if he needs to.

His cover story is that he is travelling through Jehannum hunting certain rare creatures for their body parts, which the wizards of Xoth Sarandi use in spell components. There are rumours of a den of medusas nearby, which he intends to raid as soon as his leg is healed. A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 20) reveals that he knows his magic, while a Knowledge (nature) check (DC 20) reveals that the beasts he mentions do indeed lair near here. Histramil has put a lot of work into his fake identity. He is friendly and approachable, even if the Player Character identifies him for who he is. As soon as he has a chance, he makes a break for freedom or attempts to kill the Player Character quickly and brutally.

Histramil's room is crudely furnished, as the inn is a poor one. A Search check (DC 15) turns up a letter (see below).

Captain Histramil, Male Drow Wiz12/Ftr3: CR 16; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 12d4+12 plus 3d10+3; hp 61; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +9; Grp +9; Atk +13 melee (1d6+2/19–20 plus poison, *+2 rapier*) or +11 ranged (1d8/x3 plus poison, composite shortbow), Full Atk +13/+9 melee (1d6+2/19–20 plus poison, *+2 rapier*) or +11 ranged (1d8/x3 plus poison, composite shortbow); SA poison, spells, spell-like abilities; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 26; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +10; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 13.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +6, Concentration +19, Decipher Script +9, Knowledge (arcana) +19, Knowledge (history) +19, Knowledge (the planes) +7, Handle Animal +6, Intimidate +17, Ride +6, Spellcraft +19; Combat Expertise, Dodge, Greater Spell Focus (Evocation), Improved Counterspell, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Evocation), Still Spell, Weapon Finesse.

Spells prepared (4/6/5/4/4/3/2, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th *– message, ray of frost, resistance, touch of fatigue*; 1st *– mage armour, magic missile, shield, shocking grasp, true strike (2);* 2nd *– alter self* (already cast), *bull's strength, cat's grace, eagle's splendour, scorching ray;* 3rd *– blink, displacement, fireball, haste;*

4th – *fire shield, lightning bolt* (stilled), *resilient sphere, wall of fire;* 5th – *cloudkill, cone of cold, interposing hand;* 6th – *chain lightning, repulsion.*

Equipment & Treasure: +3 elven chainmail, +2 rapier, arrows (20), composite shortbow, drow poison.

Note: Histramil's spells that have somatic components have an arcane spell failure chance of 20%, because of his *+3 elven chainmail.*

Histramil has used *alter self* to give himself the appearance of a grizzled elf. There is nothing about him to suggest that he is anything other than what he appears to be, with the exception of his *+2 rapier* – not the most obvious choice of weapon for an elven ranger. If he thinks he will have to bluff his way through a situation, he uses *eagle's splendour* first.

Histramil should be a fair challenge for a single 20th level character of any class. Once he realises that he is outmatched, he tries to flee rather than fight to the death.

Histramil's Letter

The letter is written in Undercommon. It had been sealed with a disc of black wax stamped with a serpentine *S*, but the seal is now broken. The letter has been targeted with a *secret page* spell (caster level 20) which makes it appear to be a poem in Elvish called *The Wanderer,* a lament by a warrior who has lost his lord. The real text is given below:

Loyal One,

We rejoice to learn that the tales of your death were mere human braggadocio. Your steadfastness will be needed in the times that are to come. Many who we believed to be true supporters of the Cause have flaked off like so much leprous matter. It seems only fear was keeping them true to their seniors; fear of the Ennead and of the power behind our thrones.

You must know how events fell out in Crom Calamar. The humans have woven myths about the event, claiming that an alliance of forces prevailed against us, that the Gods themselves descended to earth to fight on their side, and so on and so forth. The truth, as ever, is prosaic. Through treachery, incompetence and an unsophisticated magical stunt, the Abyssal Altar was destroyed. Our guiding force was lost to us.

From that day on, the Dark no longer spoke within our hearts. We did not know if it had abandoned us in rage because of the blasphemous loss of the Altar, or was simply unable to communicate with us without it. None of the tablets of Khun record how we communed with the Dark before the coming of the Black Titan.

We withdrew to Bahl-I-Shabran and petitioned the Goddess for direction. None came. Even She, it seems, was without the blessing of the Dark. Lonely and bitter were our cries into the shadows of our home, as we reached out for the presence we had come to trust, familiar and close as memory. We were not answered. The loyalists stayed and pledged themselves, once again, to the Ennead. We cleaved to one another, vowing eternal obeisance.

There were those who would not swear: those whose souls were revealed to be weak, as the white fat maggots are found writhing when the dark rock is lifted. These crept away through the drains and gutters, into the septic places where not even the troglodytes will go, there to conspire in their filthy apostasy. We hear that a few have gone to the upper world. So, test any that you meet. If you perceive them to be less than wholly loyal, kill them.

I cannot write at length of what has happened in this past month, for I am not of sufficient rank to be given the full information; and this letter may be intercepted, so I shall be brief. The Ennead has departed Bahl-I-Shabran, taking their most loyal retinue with them. We do not know where they have gone. Rumour in the city is that they have received word of some great catastrophe that is coming to all, man and drow alike, and have gone to find a haven for us. Only loyalty, sworn loyalty, keeps us from voicing what we all fear.

When opportunity affords, make for the Selenbrac tunnel. We will have an escort waiting to bring you home to Bahl-I-Shabran. Once you are there, we shall discuss what to do next; whether to wait and be called, or seek our fortune in some less cursed plane than this.

Your fond sister,

Sharrial

Event: A Dark Petitioner

This event is intended for a Player Character who is running a school or studying in isolation. The character has a visit from an unlikely would-be disciple.

The petitioner arrives late at night. He is wearing travellers' clothes that are ragged and foul-smelling, as if he has been sleeping in them. A rough grey cloak with a hood hides his face. This is Mhorannan, a drow elf and member of the Threnody in Velvet, who has sought out the Player Character in order to become his apprentice, disciple or squire (as appropriate for the Player Character's class). He knows that his race will be a problem, but is hoping that persistence and dedication will pay off.

Mhorannan is a relatively young drow, with only sixty years of life behind him. He is bleeding from several cuts to his face which he gained while escaping a lynch mob on the way to the Player Character's dwelling. Currently he is trained as a sorcerer (a common role for drow males) but he wishes to multiclass into whatever the Player Character can teach him to be.

The Player Character will almost certainly be suspicious of Mhorannan and may even kill him before he gets a word out. If Mhorannan is allowed to speak, he begs to be accepted as an apprentice and offers to tell the Player Character what he knows of recent developments in drow society:

'My people are not what they were. Something has gone out of them – a pride, a sense of purpose. I do not like this demented loyalty that they are now demanding, as if that would replace what they have lost. You did us a great service, you and your comrades, by defeating us. We are humbled now. There are others who think as I do. We are calling ourselves the Threnody in Velvet, because we mourn for our past, for the years we wasted in a war against those who should never have been our enemies.'

For all his painfully earnest sincerity, Mhorannan has an agenda. He wants to learn as much as he can about the Starborn and pass this information back to the members of the Threnody. If he can convince the Starborn to accept him, then perhaps the rest of his group can look to them for protection against the loyalist drow. Mhorannan is one of the most charismatic of the group, so he has been sent to make contact with the Player Characters.

If the Starborn reject the Threnody, then their cause is truly desperate. Rejected by both sides, the Threnody's members will have no choice but to find some isolated place in which to make their homes and start again.

Mhorannan, Male Drow Sor14: CR 15; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 14d4; hp 35; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +7; Grp +7; Atk +7 melee (1d6/18–20, rapier) or +9 ranged (1d4/19–20, hand crossbow); Full Atk +7/+2 melee (1d6/18–20, rapier) or +9 ranged (1d4/19–20, hand crossbow); SA spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 25; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +9; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 18.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +24, Concentration +20, Craft (weaving) +20, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Spellcraft +22; Dodge, Extend Spell, Improved Counterspell, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Concentration).

Spells known (9/5/5/4/4/3/2/1, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th *– arcane mark, detect magic, flare, ghost sound, mage hand, message, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st *– disguise self, expeditious retreat, mage armour, shield, true strike;* 2nd *– alter self, detect thoughts, protection from arrows, web, whispering wind;* 3rd *– dispel magic, displacement, invisibility sphere, nondetection;* 4th *– black tentacles, confusion, scrying, stoneskin;* 5th *– dominate person, mage's faithful hound, teleport;* 6th *– repulsion, symbol of fear;* 7th *– ethereal jaunt.*

Equipment & Treasure: Crossbow bolts (10), hand crossbow, rapier, travelling clothes.

Mhorannan is the cousin of Tarzi An'Drasta, the current head of the Threnody in Velvet. His role in the campaign is to serve as a link to the Threnody and as a source of information about what the Ennead is up to. The Threnody occasionally receives information from sympathisers in Bahl-I-Shabran and can feed it to the Player Characters through Mhorannan.

Mhorannan is also something of a wild card. Do the Player Characters really want to place their trust in a drow? Can a drow really change his nature? The Games Master should make sure that if the Player Characters do take Mhorannan on as a party member, they have plenty of reason to doubt his sincerity. There will be events later on in the campaign that may implicate him as a drow double agent and these will be more effective if the foundation for distrusting him has already been laid.

If the Player Characters do not choose to have Mhorannan on board, the Threnody approaches the Conclave of Xoth Sarandi instead.

Event: The Veil Trembles

This event is best suited for wizards, sorcerers, druids or clerics, as they have more involvement with the planes than other characters. The Player Character is alone in study (or contemplation or meditation, as appropriate) when there is a sudden disturbance:

There is a sound of violent tearing, like a sheet of sailcloth being split from top to bottom. It seems to come from all directions at once. Immediately there is a light breeze and you feel oddly weightless. All the objects nearby begin to float slowly into the air like soap bubbles.

A planar rift has caused the local conditions to mimic those of the Astral Plane. The area now has subjective local gravity, meaning that creatures can move around by imagining 'down' to be near their feet. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 30) reveals that a planar rift is probably the cause, though it is highly unusual for a plane's conditions to leak into the Material Plane. That only happens when two planes blur into one another. Spontaneous rifts such as these do happen, but usually only at sites of magical significance or areas where large amounts of magical energy have been discharged.

If the Player Character does not investigate the disturbance, the rift closes itself in ten rounds and conditions return to normal. If he does investigate, the rift can easily be found in a nearby area. It is a glimmering blue rent in space that closes itself slowly as the Player Character watches. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 20) identifies this as a rift into the Astral Plane.

This event may be bizarre enough in itself not to warrant further challenge. It foreshadows the Planequake (see next chapter) and gives the Player Characters a hint that all is not well on the Astral Plane. If the Games Master wants to give the Player Character a bit more of a struggle, a stray devourer can be sucked through the astral rent, as surprised to be on the Material Plane as the Player Character is to find it there.

If the Player Character investigates the Astral Plane after this event, there is no sign of anything amiss. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 40) discerns that there is *something* wrong, but it is difficult to define what. Investigation of known gateways through to the Outer Planes reveals that these gates are no longer there, while new ones have opened elsewhere. It is as if the Astral Plane had been jolted out of position.

Plot Event: A Royal Visit

This event leads into the first adventure of the book. Any of the Player Characters can be the subject of this event, though it is easiest if a politician, bard or similarly accessible character is involved. The Non-Player Characters need to contact the Starborn as soon as possible, so they head for the most easily-found member of the group.

A Prince of Jasmal, one of the provinces of Kahoor, arrives at the Player Character's residence (or place of contact) with a retinue of guards, attendants and flunkies. Through his major-domo, Prince Nuskahm requests an audience with 'the champion of night's jewelled veil', a poetic reference to the Starborn. When the Player Character has his first clear look at them, the Games Master should read the following:

This diplomatic visit looks more like a carnival parade. You are unsure whether the Prince has put on this show to impress you personally or whether this is simply the way things are done in Kahoor. The sedan chair in the centre of the procession presumably holds the Prince himself, borne on the shoulders of four burly eunuchs. On either side walk women with bowed heads, their faces covered with veils, their gowns so light and thin that they seem to be dissolving into the air. In front and behind march four warriors in beetle-black platemail, each armed with scimitars that glint with blue highlights. A dim glow comes from inside their helmets, as if their heads were embers.

At the head of the whole train is a lean man with black lenses over his eyes and an upturned U for a mouth, clad in a garment of grey silk and a cloak that is mottled like a moth's wings. He carries a long silver wand that he slaps on his thigh as he walks.

The moth-like gentleman is Mal'Rannuz (Sor 16), the Prince's major-domo, whose function is to ensure that all is done according to proper protocol. He expects the Player Character to receive the Prince as one important personage receives another and is profoundly shocked if the Player's behaviour is not appropriate.

The veiled women are Prince Nuskahm's bodyguards, unarmed because they do not need weapons. Each one is an 18th level monk. The armed guards are mere constructs.

The Gift: Prince Nuskahm has a gift for the Player Character: a beautiful sculpture of a tiger made from ebony overlaid with gold, so that the stripes of black wood and golden metal create the effect of a tiger's markings. The gift is worth 4,500 gold pieces, but it is purely a diplomatic gesture and carries no obligation for the Player Character.

The Games Master can have some fun with the Player Character here, as the members of the royal retinue make themselves as comfortable as they can and investigate their surroundings. As this visit is completely unannounced, the locals (if there are any) have no idea what is going on and crowd around to watch. The salient point of this event is the Prince's request for help from the Starborn, so anything else is for comedy value.

The Request: Mal'Rannuz explains the situation as follows:

'You may know that in the land of Kahoor, in the principality of Jasmal over which his Royal Highness reigns, there is a beast more great and terrible than any other on Ashfar. It is the Royal Beast, the ancient ravager of kingdoms. No warrior has ever prevailed against it, for its hide is stronger than steel and its maw has devoured armies.'

As Mal'Rannuz speaks, you get the feeling that he is rather proud of this beast, as if it were somehow a national mascot.

'The Royal Beast slumbers for centuries, then when it awakens, it ravages the land. We propitiate it with offerings – cattle, barrels of good wine, unwed maidens – which it devours, and when it has eaten it returns to its lair. This is the way it has always been. We have not sought to slay it, for legends say that it cannot be killed. Our scholars predict its awakenings. We know when to expect it to arise, so we have many months to prepare the offerings. The beast's appetite is terrific, so such lengthy preparation is absolutely necessary.

'We know not why, but the Royal Beast has awoken early. There is no offering. The Beast has become enraged and is turning Jasmal into a wasteland. You will know that Kahoor is a mighty kingdom of fierce warriors who know no fear. Many of our finest have ridden out to confront the Beast but when they attempt to slow its progress or turn it back to its lair, it pays them no heed or devours them before they can even make a dint in the creature's hide. Thus it is that we turn to you.

'We have heard the tales of your stand against the dark ones. Our minstrels have made tales of you. Artists have rendered your likenesses in carpets that hang on the walls of the most exclusive spice-houses. Even His Celestial Eminence, King Parhay the Thirty-First, has spoken your names in the Hall of Ancestry and burned olibanum in your honour on the Feast of the Nine Orbs. We need champions. We need heroes.'

A Knowledge (nature) or Knowledge (history) check (DC 30) identifies this 'Royal Beast' as the Tarrasque, though the citizens of Kahoor do not call it by that name.

In fine traditional form, Prince Nuskahm offers the Player Character and his fellow Starborn a portion of his principality to govern as their own if they will deal with the threat of the Royal Beast. They do not have to slay it. Indeed, Nuskahm does not believe that this is possible. They should merely attempt to return it to its lair deep below the hills of Jasmal and persuade it to go back to sleep again.

The Player Character should now gather the rest of the group together and head off to Jasmal. The party has the chance to make preparations, but the longer they delay heading there, the more devastation the Tarrasque will have wreaked.

The Beast of Jasmal

Summary: The opening adventure brings the Player Characters into conflict with a new and unexpected threat which no hero has confronted since the time of legends: a ravaging monster of titanic size, driven from its lair by some unknown force. The fabled Tarrasque has awoken and gone devouring.

When the Player Characters find it, they see that it is already wounded. Investigation of its cavernous lair reveals that something else has taken up residence there. A creature that can evict the Tarrasque is unheard of on Ashfar. The beast in the caverns does not belong on the Material Plane. What has brought it here?

The Principality of Jasmal

Jasmal is one of the most prosperous regions of Kahoor. Its main exports are wine and fruit. The sunny hillsides are perfect for vineyards. The landscape is one of serene beauty, with small farmsteads dotting the land and patches of dark woodland where stags roam, all overseen by a high white-walled castle. This is Nuskham's residence, where the Player Characters can unpack and refresh themselves.

To the north, the Wall of Grand Iora stretches like a white cliff across the plain, dividing Kahoor from the barbaric, untamed land of Urmish, where monstrous humanoids, goblinoids and giants roam. In the distance to the west, the summery perfection of the landscape is marred by huge dark rents torn in the earth, as if some great machine had ploughed through it again and again. These are the marks left by the Tarrasque.

The peasants of Jasmal, when encountered, do not meet the Player Characters' eyes. As the Player Characters pass by, the peasants prostrate themselves in the dust and mutter prayers for the Player Characters' health. The rigid caste system of Kahoor means that mere labourers are practically a different and inferior species from warriors, let alone champions.

The Player Characters may try to investigate the cause of the Tarrasque's early waking. They can learn the following from talking to the Prince's household and succeeding at a Gather Information check (DC 20):

- On the night when the Royal Beast arose there was a thunderstorm, which was unusual for that time of year.
- Many people felt the ground tremble, as if huge beasts were galloping to and fro underfoot. Some tried to explain it away as an earthquake.
- There were lights in the sky as well as the lightning, steady lights of a pale blue colour. Some claim that they saw figures fighting in the sky.
- The sentries on the Wall of Grand Iora say that the monstrous humanoids over in Urmish were yelling and fighting as if they were being attacked. They had blue lights appearing in their part of the sky, too.

Any Player Character who experienced 'Event: The Veil Trembles' (page 10) can confirm that this took place on the same night as the thunderstorm. It seems very likely that the same thing happened here on a much larger scale.

Location: The Village of Zubunti

Zubunti is the closest settlement to the Tarrasque's lair. The houses are simple wooden buildings with thatched roofs and chickens in the yard. The Tarrasque has not ploughed through the village, as the outlying farms offer more easily-caught food (cows and pigs) than the little humans who run away.

Talking to the peasants of Zubunti, who were directly beneath the minor planequake, is potentially rewarding but very frustrating. They tell the Player Characters anything that they think the Starborn want to hear. Completely intimidated by the Player Characters' presence, they nod, smile and say 'yes' to any question. A Sense Motive check (DC 15) is needed to discern when the peasants are telling the truth and when they are saying what they believe the Player Characters want them to say.

A Gather Information check (DC 30) persuades the villagers to work around their social taboos and tell the Starborn what they actually saw. They can divulge the following:

- On the night of the great storm, holes opened in the world. It was as if a dark cloth had stretched and split in many places, with a great light shining from beyond.
- Figures of bright light and figures of fire and smoke emerged through the holes, fought with one another and vanished. The peasants point to scorched patches of ground where they say the beings clashed.
- Many were woken by a tremendous yowl like the cry of a wild cat, if there were such a thing as a wild cat that hunted elephants instead of mice.
- One peasant, Krojen, was awakened from sleep by his dog barking madly, followed by a low growl outside his window. He looked out and saw a shape, bigger than a man, lope away into the darkness. It turned around and its eyes shone like those of a wolf (this was Rhozauur, trying unsuccessfully to sneak through the village to find a place to rest; see page 16).
- Another peasant, Jastilla, who saw the Tarrasque lurching off to the northwest by the light of the moon, is convinced she saw a large shape like a man with gleaming, bestial eyes standing close by. He wore a long cloak and seemed to be controlling the creature (this was Rhozauur again, not controlling the Tarrasque but attempting to communicate with it. The Tarrasque was too ravenously hungry to bother answering him. Rhozauur is determined to make another attempt tomorrow, when the Tarrasque has eaten more).

Searching around for clues in and around Zubunti may lead to the following discoveries; a Spot check (DC 25) or Search check (DC 25) is needed for each one.

- Beneath Krojen's window are the marks of a clawed paw like that of a lion.
- On the outskirts of the town, the paw prints of a gargantuan creature lead toward the hill where the Tarrasque was sleeping.

The Farms: The surrounding farms have been ordered to heap all of their produce on the limits of their fields, in the hope that the beast will consume it and pass on without tearing the farms apart. Everyone is hard at work loading up barrows full of fruit and piling them up in mounds.

Event: Hunting the Royal Beast

Locating the Tarrasque is not difficult. All that the Player Characters need to do is follow the trail of destruction. The beast has kept to the low ground, seeking out the fields where cattle grazed. It has stayed away from the woods but the splintered stumps of trees mark where its tail has lashed. The creature's belly has dragged a furrow in the ground which clearly shows its passage from the cavern where it slept in the southwest to the meadowlands of the northeast.

As they follow the trail, the Player Characters pass one wrecked farm after another. There is no sign of the animals or the people who used to live there, not even so much as a bone. The beast has swallowed them all up. A heap of evil-smelling dung higher than a barn is the only clue to their fate. Any Player Character who picks through this can find traces of human and animal bones jumbled together.

When they finally reach the end of the trail, the Player Characters find the Tarrasque gorging itself on a herd of cattle, on a farmstead rented by the peasant Zonjeet Chal.

Location: Zonjeet's Farm

The farmhouse is a single-storey building that used to have a thatch roof before the Tarrasque tore it off. Zonjeet is still inside, insane with fear, looking up and gibbering. He is too terrified (because of the creature's frightful presence) even to run. Fortunately for him, the Tarrasque has been distracted by the mooing of the cattle and has shuffled off to eat them. It is down the slope beside the farmhouse, its tail dangling in the duck pond, grabbing cows and swallowing them whole like a dog snatching up treats.

To the north, the Wall of Grand Iora can be seen only a few hundred feet away. Arrows in the Tarrasque's shell suggest that the sentries on the wall have taken some completely futile pot-shots at it.

With a Spot check (DC 30), the Player Characters can tell that it has been wounded. The Tarrasque regenerates damage incredibly fast but even regeneration cannot expel a foreign object from a creature's body. Jammed under its shell, wedged into its flesh, is a single black talon. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 30) identifies this as the natural weapon of a Colossal outsider of some sort; certainly nothing native to the Material Plane has claws like that.

Evidently, the Tarrasque awoke early because something attacked it. The Player Characters have the choice of trying to defeat the Tarrasque in combat or heading to its lair and trying to find out what could possibly pose a threat to such a monster.

The Tarrasque: CR 20; Colossal magical beast; HD 48d10+594; hp 858; Init +7; Spd 20 ft.; AC 35, touch 5, flat-footed 32; Base Atk +48; Grp +81; Atk +57 melee (4d8+17/18–20/x3, bite); Full Atk +57 melee (4d8+17/18–20/x3, bite) and +52 melee (1d10+8, 2 horns) and +52 melee (1d12+8, 2 claws) and +52 melee (3d8+8, tail slap); Space/Reach 30 ft./20 ft.; SA augmented critical, frightful presence, improved grab, rush, swallow whole; SQ carapace, damage reduction 15/epic, immunity to ability damage, disease, energy drain, fire and poison, regeneration 40, scent, spell resistance 32; AL N; SV Fort +38, Ref +29, Will +20; Str 45, Dex 16, Con 35, Int 3, Wis 14, Cha 14.

Skills & Feats: Listen +17, Search +9, Spot +17, Survival +14 (+16 following tracks); Alertness, Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack, Toughness (6).

Note: The Tarrasque has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Carapace (Ex): The Tarrasque's armour-like carapace is exceptionally tough and highly reflective, deflecting all rays, lines, cones and even *magic missil*e spells. There is a 30% chance of reflecting any such effect back at the caster; otherwise it is merely negated. Check for reflection before rolling to overcome the creature's spell resistance.

Frightful Presence (Su): The Tarrasque can inspire terror by charging or attacking. Affected creatures must succeed on a Will save (DC 36) or become shaken, remaining in that condition as long as they remain within 60 feet of the tarrasque.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the Tarrasque must hit a Huge or smaller opponent with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can try to swallow the foe the following round.

Regeneration (Ex): No form of attack deals lethal damage to the Tarrasque, which regenerates even if it fails a save against a *disintegrate* spell or a death effect. If the Tarrasque fails its save against a spell or effect that would kill it instantly (such as those mentioned above), the spell or effect instead deals nonlethal damage equal to the creature's full normal hit points +10 (or 868 hp). The Tarrasque is immune to effects that produce incurable or bleeding wounds. It can be slain only by raising its nonlethal damage total to its full normal hit points +10 (or 868 hit points) and using a *wish* or *miracle* spell to keep it dead. If the Tarrasque loses a limb or body part, the lost portion grows back in 1d6 minutes; the detached piece dies and decays normally. The creature can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.

Rush (Ex): Once per minute, the Tarrasque can move at a speed of 150 feet.

Swallow Whole (Ex): The Tarrasque can try to swallow a grabbed opponent of Huge or smaller size by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent is dealt 2d8+8 points of crushing damage plus 2d8+6 points of acid damage per round from the Tarrasque's digestive juices. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by dealing 50 points of damage to the Tarrasque's digestive tract (AC 25). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out. The Tarrasque's gullet can hold two Huge, eight Large, 32 Medium, 128 Small or 512 Tiny or smaller creatures.

Location: The Tarrasque's Lair

The opening to the caverns where the Tarrasque sleeps is well known and easy to find. Nobody is allowed to go there without special permission from the Prince, as the citizens live in fear of waking the beast early.

The cave mouth is located halfway up a hill in the wilderness, far to the southwest, almost out of sight of the farmsteads. The ground here is more barren and rocky than the regions closer to the Prince's estate.

The Altars of Propitiation: Outside the cave lie three immense blocks of stone. They have been fashioned into rough rectangular shapes and seem to have been here for thousands of years. This is where the people of Jasmal leave their offerings at the times when the beast is due to wake.

Descent: The cavern is thirty feet across; it slopes downward at the back and becomes a steeply plunging tunnel. Broken rock formations show where the creature scrambled through and pools of blood – dried to a thick crust on the floor – show that it was wounded when it did so.

Along with the reptilian stench of the Tarrasque, there is a fetid feline odour here like that of the spoor of a big cat.

The Lair: The immense vault where the Tarrasque slumbered is surprisingly warm for an underground cavern. Splashes of gore deck the walls, floor and roof, making the region stink like an abattoir. Clearly, a vicious fight took place here.

The Lurking Predator: Skulking at the back of the cavern, doing its best to hide so that it can ambush the Player Characters, is a tayellah. This monster was cast onto the Material Plane on the night of the first, minor planequake. Its instinct was to look for a place to make its lair, so it headed for the Tarrasque's tunnel. Moving stealthily, it failed to wake the slumbering beast and was able to attack it viciously before the Tarrasque could defend itself. The wounded Tarrasque, surprised and in unprecedented pain, fled its lair and headed into the upper world.

Jasmal now has two beasts to worry about. The tayellah is a very hard challenge even for 20th level characters. Killing it is one way to solve the problem, but not necessarily the best.

When the tayellah emerges from hiding, the Player Characters can see that it has a shining, studded mithral collar around its central neck. Since it obviously could not have donned this itself, someone must have put it there. The tayellah must belong to somebody or perhaps it is the sacred animal of some cult. If the Player Characters come close enough to read the runes on the collar, they see that they spell out the name *Mourngrim* in the Common tongue.

Mourngrim the Tayellah: CR 24; Gargantuan magical beast; HD 34d10+448; hp 635; Init +27; Spd 100 ft.; AC 44, touch 25, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +34; Grp +57; Atk +52 melee (2d8+11, claw); Full Atk +52 melee (2d8+11, 2 claws) and +47 melee (2d6+5, 3 bites) and +44 melee (3d6+5 plus poison, sting); Space/Reach 20 ft./15 ft.; SA improved grab, pounce, rake 4d6+15; SQ damage reduction 10/epic, spell resistance 34; AL N; SV Fort +31, Ref +38, Will +22; Str 32, Dex 48, Con 34, Int 14, Wis 32, Cha 19.

Skills & Feats: Hide +44, Jump +39, Listen +48, Move Silently +56, Spot +48; Combat Reflexes, Epic Toughness (x2), Epic Weapon Focus (bite), Epic Weapon Focus (claw), Iron Will, Superior Initiative, Track, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).

Poison (Ex): Sting, Fort save (DC 39); initial and secondary Damage 2d10 temporary Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Pounce (Ex): If a tayellah leaps upon a foe during the first round of combat, it can make a full attack even if it has already taken a move action.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the tayellah must hit with two of its claw attacks. If it gets a hold, it can rake.

Rake (Ex): A tayellah that gets a hold can make two additional rake attacks (+44 melee) with legs it normally only uses for walking, dealing 4d6+5 points of Damage each. If the tayellah pounces on an opponent, it can also rake.

Equipment & Treasure: Mithral collar.

Non-Player Character: Rhozauur the Justified

Rhozauur is a leonal of greater than average power and influence, the suzerain of the plains of Dhari, a broad region of savannah on the plane of the Summerlands, the good-aligned side of Ardentia (see The Crumbling Skull of Space). He has raised Mourngrim from a cub, training her to accompany him on his hunting raids against the vast horrors that stalk the Shadowlands, the evil-aligned underside of the plane.

When the planequake hit, Mourngrim was dragged into a rift. Rhozauur does not know where she is, though he has an idea of the region of the Material Plane into which she was flung, thanks to the divinations his friends have carried out. With the help of the Sylvan Covenant, he has travelled here to find her and take her home before she causes any trouble.

Rhozauur hides in barns and copses by day (meditating instead of sleeping, as he is an outsider) and looks for Mourngrim by night, believing that this will scare the locals less. Although he is good-aligned, he does not think that a large lion-headed man is going to be very well received around here.

If the Player Characters kill Mourngrim, Rhozauur is deeply upset but strives to forgive them if they honestly believed they were doing the right thing. If they kill her just because she is a monster and they have the chance to do it, Rhozauur is stiff and formal with them and does not help them if he can avoid it.

Rhozauur: CR 20; Large outsider (extraplanar, good); HD 26d8+182; hp 299; Init +3; Spd 60 ft.; AC 28, touch 13, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +26; Grp +43; Atk +39 melee (1d8+13, claw) or +31 ranged (1d8+16/x3, *+3 longbow of unerring accuracy*); Full Atk +39 melee (1d8+13, 2 claws) and +37 melee (2d6+6, bite) or +31/+26/+21/+16 ranged (1d8+16/x3 epic, *+3 longbow of unerring accuracy*); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA improved grab, pounce, rake 1d8+16, roar, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10/evil and silver, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 3, immunity to electrical and petrification, lay on hands, low-light vision, protective aura, resistance to cold 10 and sonic 10, speak with animals, spell resistance 36; AL NG; SV Fort +22 (+24 against poison), Ref +18, Will +17; Str 36, Dex 16, Con 24, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Balance +32, Concentration +24, Diplomacy +24, Handle Animal +15, Hide +28, Intimidate +11, Jump +49, Knowledge (nature) +26, Listen +27, Move Silently +31, Sense Motive +27, Spot +27, Survival +27; Ability Focus (roar), Dodge, Fast Healing, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Multiattack, Spring Attack, Track, Weapon Focus (claw).

Note: Rhozauur has a +4 racial bonus on Balance, Hide and Move Silently checks.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Rhozauur must hit with his bite attack. He can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he wins the grapple check, he establishes a hold and can rake.

Lay on Hands (Su): As the paladin class feature, except that each day Rhozauur can heal 299 points of damage.

Pounce (Ex): If Rhozauur charges a foe, he can make a full attack, including two rake attacks.

Protective Aura (Su): Against attacks made or effects created by evil creatures, this ability provides a +4 deflection bonus to Armour Class and a +4 resistance bonus on saves to anyone within 20 feet of Rhozauur. Otherwise it functions as a *magic circle against evil* effect and a *lesser globe of invulnerability*, both with a radius of 20 feet and an effective caster level of 26th. The defensive benefits from the circle are not included in Rhozauur's statistics block.

Rake (Ex): Attack bonus +49 melee, damage 1d8+13.

Roar (Su): Rhozauur can roar up to three times per day. Each roar releases a blast in a 60-foot cone that duplicates the effects of a *holy word* spell and deals an extra 2d6 points of sonic damage. A Fortitude save (DC 28) negates this. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Speak with Animals (Su): This ability works like *speak with animals* (caster level 8th) but is a free action and does not require sound.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *detect thoughts*, *fireball* (DC 16), *hold monster* (DC 18), *polymorph*, *wall of force;* 3/day – *cure critical wounds* (DC 17), *neutralise poison*, *remove disease;* 1/day – *heal* (DC 19). The caster level is 10th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Equipment & Treasure: +3 longbow of unerring accuracy (epic), *amulet of the planes* (on loan from Vospheral of the Sylvan Covenant), arrows (20).

At a height of eight feet, Rhozauur towers over most humanoids. His fur is dark gold in colour, with a white patch on his left temple where a blow once nearly killed him. He wears a long hooded cloak of dark brown which makes him look less inhuman from a distance – though not much.

On his home plane, he is a passionate defender of wild animals, working with the sylvan druids to keep the Summerlands (and especially the Hallowgarden) safe from the huntsmen of Jasmeera's Court and the denizens of the Shadowlands (see The Crumbling Skull of Space for more details about these).

Introducing Rhozauur: The Games Master should have Rhozauur appear when it would be most appropriate to the story, depending on what the Player Characters do. If they deliberately try to find him, they should succeed. Rhozauur can be found hiding in a barn on the outskirts of Zubunti, waiting for sunset. If attacked, he counterattacks viciously, thinking that anyone armed with weapons and magic that can hurt him has clearly come here in the belief that the land is infested with magical monsters.

Talking to Rhozauur: The leonal is happy to talk, if the Player Characters are willing. They can learn the following:

- He comes from the plane of Ardentia, a disc-shaped world where the sun always shines on one side and the moon always remains on the other. The solar lands are inherently good-aligned, while the moonlit lands are attuned to evil. Consequently, creatures of good and evil alignment congregate on their respective sides. At the perimeter are the border peaks, mountains like broken teeth where the winds of chaos blow. The ground beneath someone on Ardentia is always 'down', so one can ride to the edge of the world and over it without falling off.

- Rhozauur is a beastwarden – a guardian of animals – in service to the Sylvan Covenant, the alliance of extraplanar elves who watch over the Summerlands. The opposing faction is the Court of Jasmeera.

- He does not want to kill the Tarrasque, as it is not evil and is merely acting according to its nature. He thinks that it can be persuaded to return to its lair and go back to sleep. He is wrong, but such is his regard for wild beasts that he refuses to help kill the creature without trying to talk to it first.

- If and only if the Player Characters win his trust, he explains that he is here because of Mourngrim. He is loath to say anything about her, because he is afraid she will be hunted down and killed as a threat.

Event: The Huntsman Cometh

As the Player Characters will learn in later chapters, there is no love lost between the Sylvan Covenant (the nobility who rule and guard the Summerlands) and the Court of Jasmeera, a group of cruel and twisted elves who have made their homes in the Shadowlands on the other side of the plane.

The planequake affected both sides of Ardentia, the bright and the shadow. When the planequake struck, the elven huntsman Gan Scarrow, who as a member of Jasmeera's Court has a deep loathing for Rhozauur and all of his creatures, was preparing for a raid into the Summerlands to slaughter a few of Rhozauur's precious cloud gazelles. As he rode through the sky over the border peaks and came within view of the plains of Dhari, the planar rifts broke open all around him; frightened, he turned around and fled.

He later discovered from Queen Jasmeera, who sees all in her bowl of fecund dreams, that the beastwarden of the Summerlands had left his plane and gone to some miserable mortal burg. Scarrow decided that he would go and cause a little trouble there for Rhozauur. Upon arrival he used *speak with animals* to ask the local fauna what was happening and found out about the Tarrasque. What a perfect opportunity to incriminate the leonal, who of course will not want the monster dead!

Gan Scarrow arrives at the castle of Prince Nuskahm the day after the Player Characters do. If they have already set off to hunt the Tarrasque, they miss his arrival; if not, they can see him present himself at the gates, with all the formality and decorum that a nobleman should possess. With his shortbow, fur-trimmed cloak and ranger's garb, he is evidently a hunter. His features are sharp and he has a sour expression, as if he were growing bored with everything he sees.

The fearsome armoured creature trotting at his heels looks as if it is yearning for permission to begin ripping out throats. The peasants run and hide as it approaches. From afar it looks like some ghastly hybrid of predator and machine; when examined closer, one can see that it is a dire lion fitted with spiked barding. Scarrow calls it Ulrich.

Gan Scarrow, Male Elf Rgr22: CR 22; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 22d8; hp 99; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 29, touch 20, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +21; Grp +23; Atk +25 melee (1d8+4/17–20, *+2 longsword of good outsider dread*) or +31 ranged (1d8+2/19–20/x3, *+2 shortbow of far shot*); Full Atk +25/+20/+15/+10 melee (1d8+4/17–20, *+2 longsword of good outsider dread*) or +31/+26/+21/+16 ranged (1d8+2/19–20/x3, *+2 shortbow of far shot*) or +29/+/29/+24/+19/+14 ranged (1d8+2/19–20/x3, *+2 shortbow of far shot*); SA favoured enemies; SQ camouflage, elf traits, evasion, hide in plain sight, low-light vision, swift tracker, woodland stride; AL NE; SV Fort +13, Ref +20, Will +10; Str 14, Dex 18 (24), Con 10, Int 8, Wis 16, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Handle Animal +10, Hide +20, Jump +7, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +4, Knowledge (geography) +4, Listen +18, Move Silently +22, Ride +22, Search +11, Spot +20, Survival +10, Use Rope +10; Combat Archery, Dodge, Endurance[B], Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Critical (shortbow), Improved Initiative, Improved Precise Shot[B], Manyshot[B], Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot[B], Track[B], Weapon Focus (shortbow).

Spells prepared (4/4/4/3, save DC 13 + spell level): 1st – *alarm, entangle, longstrider, pass without trace;* 2nd – *barkskin, bear's endurance, hold animal, spike growth;* 3rd – *darkvision, greater magic fang, neutralise poison, tree shape;* 4th – *animal growth, cure serious wounds, tree stride.*

First Favoured Enemy: Good outsiders (+6 bonus)
Second Favoured Enemy: Magical beasts (+4 bonus)

Third Favoured Enemy: Humanoids (elves) (+4 bonus)
Fourth Favoured Enemy: Humanoids (humans) (+2 bonus)
Fifth Favoured Enemy: Plants (+2 bonus)

Equipment & Treasure: +5 chain shirt, +2 longsword of good outsider dread (epic), *+2 shortbow of far shot* (epic), arrows (20), *elixir of hiding, gloves of dexterity +6, ring of protection +3*.

Ulrich the War-Lion (dire lion): CR –; Large animal; HD 8d8+24; hp 60; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 25, touch 9, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +6; Grp +17; Atk +13 melee (1d6+7, claw); Full Atk +13 melee (1d6+7, 2 claws) and +7 melee (1d8+3, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA improved grab, pounce, rake 1d6+3; SQ link, low-light vision, scent, share spells; AL NE; SV Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +7; Str 25, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Hide -4, Listen +7, Move Silently –1, Spot +7; Alertness, Run, Weapon Focus (claw).

Equipment & Treasure: +5 spiked half plate barding.

Event: Scarrow's Proposal

Scarrow introduces himself to the court (whether the Player Characters are there or not) and explains that he is an experienced hunter from a neighbouring plane, who is sorry to see the trouble this land is having:

'It seems that certain lawless personages have crossed the border between our lands and yours. One such, a creature part beast and part man, has escaped from us and has sought refuge in this fair kingdom. I have no doubt that he is responsible for awakening the horror that now plagues you.

'He is not a bad creature, by your criteria; he is simply deluded and does not believe that people have any right to repress the great beasts of the world. He considers that the creature has just as much of a right to eat you, Your Highness, as you do to kill and eat a chicken! No doubt he holds these views because he is partly bestial himself.

'If we find the perpetrator, capture him and bring him back to my plane, his influence over the beast will end. You must seek the master, not the pet. He will certainly try to sabotage any attempt to slay it, so we must render him powerless first. When he is in custody, I will gladly lend my aid to the heroes you have employed already, to kill or contain this Tarrasque as you see fit.

'I ask nothing in recompense. It is the least I can do, after a denizen of my world has caused such tragic destruction.'

If the Player Characters do not or cannot intervene, Prince Nuskahm is delighted with this proposal and immediately authorises Scarrow to begin hunting for the beast-man (Rhozauur, of course). If they suspect that something is amiss and try to keep Scarrow in check, he bows and politely admits their right to a contesting opinion, pledging to abide by whatever the Prince thinks best.

Whatever Scarrow agrees to, he tries to track the Player Characters and find out what they are doing, in the hope that they will find Rhozauur for him.

Talking to Scarrow: If the Player Characters ask Scarrow for information about his home plane and the event that caused the 'beast-man' to be transported here, he can tell them the following:

- Ardentia is a great disc with continual, remorseless daylight on one side and peaceful moonlight on the other. There are two courts, the Sylvan Covenant and the Court of Jasmeera. The Sylvan Covenant believes that it rules over the whole disc and resents Jasmeera's independence.

- The planequake event caused luminous rents to appear in space, as if a clawed hand had struck it from behind.

If Scarrow Finds Rhozauur: Scarrow does not try to kill Rhozauur unless he is on his own. If there is anyone else present, Scarrow insists that Rhozauur should be captured alive to be returned to Ardentia for trial. Naturally this 'trial' will involve Queen Jasmeera's arbitrary idea of justice, but he is not about to tell the Player Characters this.

Rhozauur is painfully aware that the evidence is against him, especially if he has urged the Player Characters not to kill the Tarrasque or if his pet tayellah has slain anyone. All he has in his favour are his good alignment, his self-evident identity as a leonal – as his people are known to be good outsiders – and his unwillingness to attack without being attacked first. He tries to convince the Player Characters not to trust Scarrow but given that Scarrow is willing to help hunt the Tarrasque and Rhozauur is not, he is once again in a weak position.

Prince Nuskahm is extremely keen to give the elven huntsman a chance, especially since elves are highly regarded in Kahoor and the elite classes model themselves upon them. Nuskahm does not trust Rhozauur, good alignment or no good alignment. What the leonal wants is not what is good for the kingdom.

Event: Once More Unto the Breach, You Scum

If the Games Master wants to flesh out the adventure with some additional combat encounters, the following development can be added.

The Tarrasque is not used to being hurt. The pain from Mourngrim's claws startled it; nothing has wounded it since the times before man arose. If the Player Characters wound it, it does not stand around and wait to be wounded a second time. It bolts, roaring and stampeding northwards, away from the places where the humans are… and straight towards the Wall of Grand Iora. Rushing, running and rushing again, it covers the distance quickly. The Player Characters can easily keep up with it.

With a final rush, the Tarrasque flings itself into the air as if it thinks it has a chance of clearing the wall. The result is the only one possible when a 180-ton monstrosity with little more brains than a stale loaf of bread attempts to leap a fifty-foot barrier. Once the noise of falling masonry dies down, the Player Characters are left facing an angry (and slightly dazed) Tarrasque and a massive breach in the Wall of Grand Iora, which has kept Kahoor safe from invading monstrous humanoids for years.

The breach is fifty feet across. The wall is fifty feet high and twenty feet thick, with a hollow section in the middle to allow archers to patrol at lower levels. It was not designed to withstand this kind of impact.

On the night of the planequake, outsiders that came through the planar rifts attacked the monstrous humanoids of Urmish, who mobilised for war in case it happened again. Now, with an army ready, the humanoids find that the lumbering Tarrasque has smashed straight through the Wall of Grand Iora! This is an opportunity too good to miss…

The invaders descend upon the breach as fast as the Games Master wishes to allow. The monstrous humanoids include Cormorag, a legend among ettins; Sepsis Yellow-Eye, the hobgoblin equivalent of Genghis Khan; and Chagral of the Many Scars, Sepsis' orc right-hand man. Along with these leaders comes an impromptu war-band of orcs led by hobgoblins.

They stay well back from the Tarrasque, circling around it to reach the breach and pour through it if they can. If the Player Characters fight the Tarrasque, the humanoids jeer and cheer the monster on, whooping in delight if anyone is swallowed.

Cormorag, Male Ettin Ftr14: CR 20; Large giant; HD 10d8+20 plus 14d10+28; hp 170; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 24, touch 8, flat-footed 24; Base Atk +19; Grp +31; Atk +27 melee (2d6+8/19–20, morningstar) or +17 ranged (1d8+8, javelin); Full Atk +27/+22/+17/+12 melee (2d6+8/19–20, 2 morningstars) or +17 ranged (1d8+8, 2 javelins); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SQ low-light vision, superior two-weapon fighting; AL CE; SV Fort +18, Ref +7, Will +10; Str 27, Dex 8, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 11.

Skills & Feats: Intimidate +6, Listen +14, Search +1, Spot +14; Alertness, Awesome Blow, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (morningstar), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Armour (4), Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (morningstar).

Note: Cormorag's two heads give it a +2 racial bonus on Listen, Spot, and Search checks.

Superior Two-Weapon Fighting (Ex): Cormorag fights with a morningstar in each hand. Because each of its two heads controls an arm, it does not take a penalty on attack or damage rolls for attacking with two weapons.

Equipment & Treasure: Hide armour, javelins (2), morningstars (2).

Cormorag is not affiliated with Sepsis Yellow-Eye. It is only taking part in the raid because it loathes the humans of Kahoor, who have shot at it frequently from the safety of their turrets.

Sepsis Yellow-Eye, Male Hobgoblin Ftr20: CR 20; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 20d10+60; hp 170; Init +6; Spd 20 ft.; AC 31, touch 12, flat-footed 29; Base Atk +20; Grp +24; Atk +30 melee (1d6+11 plus 1d6 fire/19–20/x4, *+5 heavy pick of flaming burst*) or +22 ranged (1d6+4, javelin); Full Atk +30/+25/+20/+15 melee (1d6+11 plus 1d6 fire/19–20/x4, *+5 heavy pick of flaming burst*) or +22 ranged (1d6+4, javelin); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +17, Ref +10, Will +9; Str 19, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Climb +12, Handle Animal +8, Intimidate +18, Jump +12, Listen +3, Move Silently +6, Ride +12, Spot +3; Alertness, Cleave, Dodge, Endurance, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (pick), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lighting Reflexes, Mobility, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack, Spring Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (pick), Weapon Specialisation (pick).

Equipment & Treasure: +4 breastplate, +5 heavy pick of flaming burst, +3 spiked shield, amulet of natural armour +5.

Sepsis is a surprisingly small hobgoblin to be the leader of so many. His left eye continually weeps with a gummy fluid like pine resin. He gained his reputation simply by being totally, uncompromisingly ruthless and persisting when others gave up. When other hobgoblins starved in times of famine, Sepsis forced himself to hunt for food, eating the wastes of others and beating rivals to death with a pick handle.

Later, when he gained authority, anyone who Sepsis even suspected of insurrection was clubbed to death, and hobgoblins who were physically far stronger became terrified of him. He has led several attacks against the Wall of Grand Iora, including a cunning scheme to tunnel beneath it and collapse part of the wall, none of which have succeeded.

Chagral of the Many Scars, Male Orc Bbn20: CR 20; Medium humanoid (orc); HD 20d12+40; hp 170; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +20; Grp +26; Atk +29 melee (1d12+12/19–20/x3, *+3 vorpal adamantine greataxe*); Full Atk +29/+24/+19/+14 melee (1d12+12/19–20/x3, *+3 vorpal adamantine greataxe*); SA tireless mighty rage 6/day; SQ damage reduction 5/—, darkvision 60 ft., improved uncanny dodge, indomitable will, light sensitivity, trap sense +6; AL CE; SV Fort +14, Ref +8, Will +6; Str 22, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills & Feats: Climb +14, Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +15, Listen +16, Survival +8; Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (greataxe), Improved Overrun, Iron Will, Power Attack, Track.

Rage: When raging, Chagral gains a +8 bonus to Strength and Constitution. This gives him a +4 bonus on attack and damage rolls with melee weapons and 80 temporary hit points. He also gains a +4 morale bonus to Will saves and a –2 penalty to Armour Class.

Equipment & Treasure: +3 vorpal adamantine greataxe, rhino hide armour.

Chagral is Sepsis' enforcer among the lesser goblinoids. He is a mass of flesh, webbed over with scar tissue and the marks of twine stitches. His upper and lower jaws are out of alignment – the lower is twisted to the right – so when he speaks, he sounds as though he is holding his nose. He can easily be mistaken for a badly made flesh golem.

The Warband: The horde of 4,000 orcs is composed mostly of 1st level warriors led by 3rd level lieutenants and 7th level hobgoblin captains. The Player Characters are not likely to be at risk from such creatures, even if they face the horde without an army of their own backing them up; they are simply not good enough combatants to score hits against the Armour Class the Player Characters will have by 20th level. It is best for the Games Master to handle combat narratively until the Player Characters come up against one of the three principal enemies described above.

The Response from Jasmal

On learning that the wall has been breached, the Prince mobilises as much of an army as he can while the main force from the capital city of Kahoor heads for the breach as quickly as it can march. Jasmal does not have much of an army, as the wall has been the main line of defence for generations and has not needed more than its standing garrison of archers.

If the Player Characters do not cut the head off the beast by slaying Sepsis Yellow-Eye, the orc horde entrenches in Jasmal, moving into the unoccupied farms that were abandoned when the Tarrasque awoke. Drum signals echo back into Urmish, calling even more monstrous humanoids, orcs, giants and goblins to the breach. Jasmal is ripe for the taking; thanks to the Tarrasque, the region next to the breach is all but abandoned.

Aftermath

The outcome of the event depends on the Player Characters. It can end with many deaths and the loss of an entire province, or with no deaths at all. Each of the Non-Player Characters wants something different. Rhozauur wants Mourngrim back, Scarrow wants Rhozauur's head on a plate and Prince Nuskahm wants his kingdom to be safe. The Player Characters' choices here have consequences in The Crumbling Skull of Space, in which they meet the Sylvan Covenant and the Court of Jasmeera. If they side with either Rhozauur or Scarrow, the appropriate faction will remember this in their favour once the politics and arguments begin.

Investigating the Planar Rifts

The mysterious rents between planes are the cause of all this chaos. By now the Player Characters are probably wondering what caused them. There are several places they can look for

answers. The Conclave of Xoth Sarandi, introduced in *The Drow War, Book Two*, has proven knowledgeable about planar matters before. The Player Characters can also use spells such as *contact other plane* or travel to the Astral Plane and beyond to seek out information from outsiders.

Whichever methods they use, they can find out the following:

- The planar rifts seem to be the results of a shockwave travelling through the multiverse. Neighbouring planes grind against each other in a way similar to tectonic plates. At weak points the fabric of reality tears and the differences in pressure cause creatures to be sucked through the rifts.

- For some reason there has been a rearrangement of reality. Some portals from the Astral Plane to other planes have moved or disappeared altogether, while new portals have opened up. It is as if someone has removed a card from the cosmic deck, causing a reshuffle as the planes move into new positions.

- With a Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 30) and some intense research, a character can pinpoint the plane where the shockwave began. The origin point is a plane often called Sakurafu, a derelict shadow of a place.

Sakurafu

In volumes of planar lore, Sakurafu barely merits a footnote. It is notable only for its complete lack of anything noteworthy. The chronicler Dyanthor wrote this of it:

'The world is one of grey rocks standing alone in seas of grey sand beneath a sky like marbled tin. The winds that blow there are lukewarm, and no plants grow other than a sort of half-hearted pink lichen that can be seen on some of the rocks. The only life forms any researcher has discovered are small white creatures like trilobites or horseshoe crabs moving with unbearable slowness across the dunes. They extract nourishment from the sand by some process that is doubtless fascinating to someone in this universe, though not I. If shouted at, they die of surprise.'

Attempts to find portals to Sakurafu from the Astral Plane are futile. There do not seem to be any. If the Player Characters travel to Sakurafu by means of a *plane shift* or similar method, they are in for a rude shock:

You are in an unending void of utter darkness and utter cold. The space around you sucks at your flesh as if it means to tear the very life force out of you. Titanic fragments of dark matter tumble past, far too silent for things so huge. This cannot be the plane of Sakurafu.

If any of the Player Characters have visited the Negative Energy Plane before, they recognise this plane as being very similar. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 30) correctly identifies what has happened here. Sakurafu has been destroyed. The fragments of dark matter are all that is left of what was once a world. There is less than nothing left here now. Instead of mere space, this is a void of negative energy.

Conditions here are almost identical to those of the Negative Material Plane:

- Subjective directional gravity.

- Major negative-dominant. Each round, those within must make a Fortitude save (DC 25) or gain a negative level. A creature whose negative levels equal its current levels or Hit Dice is slain, becoming a wraith. The *death ward* spell offers protection from the damage and energy drain.

- Enhanced magic. Spells and spell-like abilities that use negative energy are maximised.

- Impeded magic. Spells and spell-like abilities that use positive energy, including *cure* spells, are impeded.

There are no creatures here at all.

The Terrible Conclusion

There is only one conclusion, unthinkable though it seems. Somehow an unknown agency has torn a hole in reality and upset the order of the multiverse.

Was this an accident? Was Sakurafu annihilated deliberately and if so, why? What could anyone have to gain by destroying such a dull place? Was the dullness merely on the surface? Was someone carrying out experiments? The Games Master should use multiple Knowledge (the planes) and Knowledge (arcana) checks to prompt the Player Characters with these lines of thought, as the ideas would occur to the characters, if not the players themselves.

Planequake

Summary: The upheaval in the planes occurs again, only this time it goes on for much longer, with far more catastrophic results. The very multiverse is shaken, pitching denizens of Outer Planes into the Material Plane and dragging screaming citizens through rifts into alien worlds. Demons and angels appear in the skies of Ashfar, hurling celestial light and scorching hellfire at one another. Magicians who attempt to *plane shift* to familiar places arrive in unknown zones or vanish from the multiverse altogether, as if they had leapt into a *sphere of annihilation.*

While the Player Characters deal with the sudden terror of a demonic invasion, the mages of the Conclave try to find an answer. Entities from good-aligned planes give the Player Characters advice, telling them to seek the counsel of the philosopher Lord Fnut, who dwells with his brethren on the plane of Arithmea. This plane proves to be abandoned – or so it seems at first. As they investigate the strange islands of masonry, the Player Characters encounter tests left behind by the philosophers, who wished to ensure that only the intelligent and wise would be able to follow them to their new sanctuary.

Following these directions leads to a strange plane, a seemingly limitless void. The plane's sole feature is the partly shattered skull of a dead god, drifting in the starless sky and lit by a dazzling opal hundreds of feet across. The god's remains anchor the place in reality, preventing the planequake from disrupting the realm within. Other people are already here…

Plot Event: The Planequake Strikes

This event happens when one or more of the Player Characters is in a town or city:

Without warning, the ground begins to tremble, then to shake violently. At the same time there is a sound like thunder from above, with a brittle edge to it, as if the sky were a pane of glass that was cracking in half, followed by a whining roar of rising wind.

Skittering blue lights crawl across the horizon. Glowing spots appear in the air before you, like the afterimages you see when the sun dazzles your eyes. These spots blossom and expand. You catch glimpses of strange worlds through them: a huge head buried up to the neck in a swamp of black mud, a city made from carved wooden steeples and discs, a man with glowing eyes floating in an egg of blue liquid who looks up at you in amazement. The images last for an instant and are gone.

The spots widen even further. There are screams from the streets outside. A man is yelling to bar all the doors and close the shutters, to keep 'them' out. A woman's voice shrieks repeatedly that it is the end of the world; that it is too late to repent. There are louder screams that you recognise all too easily as the sounds of people dying in pain.

What a Planequake Is

A planequake is a blessedly rare event that can cause catastrophic damage to whole worlds. When the order of the planes is violently upset, such as by the removal of an entire plane or the sudden addition of a new one, the resulting shock passes through the planes and disrupts the delicate system of fissures and points of contact that connects them.

The first result is a monumental shifting of astral menstruum, like a vast ocean slowly oscillating after the impact of a meteorite. This makes planar travel unpredictable and dangerous. Only a powerful caster can impose his will on the planes forcefully enough to get the result he wants.

As the matrix of the planes is multidimensional, the second result is that planes collide, even if they seem to be 'far away' from each other. There is no *distance* as such in planar geometry and the proximity of one plane to another is more a matter of metaphysics than one of mundane measurement. The collision of planes manifests as a series of rifts in space opening directly onto other worlds and in entropic fissures that disintegrate the matter with which they come into contact.

Like earthquakes, planequakes continue to reverberate for some time after the initial onset, eventually dying away.

Effects of the Planequake

The planequake interferes with attempts to cross from one plane to another. Magic that involves shifting into the Ethereal Plane, including spells such as *teleport*, *blink* and *ethereal jaunt*, is unaffected. Travelling into the Astral Plane, such as by means of an *astral projection* spell, is similarly unaffected so long as the caster goes no further than the Astral Plane.

However, accessing an Outer Plane is much less safe. The Astral Plane no longer offers a reliable conduit to the Outer Planes. Spells that depend on accessing Outer Planes either through the Astral Plane or directly, such as *plane shift* or *gate*, are subject to a chance of catastrophic failure. *Summoning* spells are also affected, as they bring creatures to the Material Plane from other planes.

The caster of such a spell must make a caster level check, the difficulty of which is dependent upon the severity of the planequake; in the initial throes, planar travel is all but impossible, becoming easier as the shockwaves die down. If the check succeeds, the spell functions normally. If it fails, the amount by which the check is failed determines the result as described below. A magic item such as an *amulet of the planes* uses its caster level to make the check instead of its owner's. The exceptions to this are *staves* (such as a *staff of conjuration*), which use the owner's caster level.

For example, in the initial impact stage of a planequake, a wizard casting a *plane shift* spell (7th level) to enter a neutral-good-aligned Outer Plane would require a caster level check (DC 37) – a nigh suicidal act. In the aftershock phase, the same spell would require a caster level check (DC 22).

When attempting to summon a specific outsider, such as in the summoning applications of *gate* or *planar ally*, any result other than success is a simple failure.

Casting Planar Transit Spells

Planequake Stage	Caster Level Check DC
Initial impact (6 hours)	30
Secondary shockwaves (24 hours)	25
Ongoing upheavals (3 days)	20
Aftershock (1 week)	15

Plane Transit Mishaps

Degree of Failure	Result
More than 20	Obliteration/Rift
11–20	Major planar error
6–10	Minor planar error
1–5	Fizzle

Fizzle: The spell simply fails to function. The caster is not able to make any headway against the churning astral tides.

Minor Planar Error: The destination plane (or source plane, in the case of a *summoning*) is different from the one the caster intended to reach. The difference is one step away on the alignment axis. A caster who intended to reach a neutral good plane would therefore reach a lawful good or chaotic good plane instead. Summoned creatures are similarly selected from a column one step away. If this results in a summoned creature that is not of the caster's alignment, the creature is not compelled to obey the caster.

Major Planar Error: The target plane is missed completely. A new destination plane is selected at random. If the spell is a *summoning*, the Games Master chooses a random outsider of suitable Hit Dice to appear instead of the intended creature. The summoned creature is not compelled to obedience.

Obliteration/Rift: The caster's attempts to navigate the planes go horribly wrong. If the spell is intended to transport him to another plane, he must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC as for the caster level check, without the spell's level added on to it) or be disintegrated to a fine ash. If the saving throw is successful, he is still dealt 5d6 points of damage. If the spell is intended to transport other creatures as well as the caster, they must also make saving throws or suffer the same results, though they gain a +5 circumstance bonus to the saving throw.

If the spell is a summoning, it does not function at all. Instead, a random rift (see below) manifests and remains for ten rounds. There is a 10% chance per round that a chaotic outsider of 14–20 Hit Dice, determined randomly, will step through the rift.

Duration of the Planequake

The planequake, savage though it is, is not permanent. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 40) establishes that this disruption will probably last from four to six days, assuming nothing happens to prolong it. The multiverse will settle back down if it is given a chance.

The more important question, as the Player Characters know if they investigated Sakurafu in the last chapter, is what will happen *next* time. The last planequake was the result of someone removing a plane completely from the continuum, so this one probably is too. Too much damage done to the multiverse before it has had a chance to repair itself could lead to a cascade effect. If the next planequake is even worse, it is not impossible that the fundamental structure of the planes could begin to collapse.

The Rifts

During a planequake, planar rifts are torn in the fabric of the universe. A planar rift acts like a *gate* spell, connecting two planes. The rifts appear spontaneously and no two are ever closer together than 100 feet. There are two types of planar rifts: random and steady. 80% of planar rifts are random.

Random Rifts: A random rift establishes a connection to a random plane each round. The disruption of the planes' underlying structure means that there is an endless number of planes that are, as it were, scrolling past the 'window' of the rift.

A creature who steps into such a rift is pitched into a randomly selected plane. Random rifts also have a chance to spit out strange creatures pulled from their home planes. These creatures are often chaotic outsiders, as random rifts cycle through a good many planes that are hardly planes at all, merely inchoate drifts of existence.

The Games Master should have the random rifts produce creatures when it is dramatically appropriate, rather than by following a percentile rule. The random rifts illustrate the chaos of the planequake and the insanity of the nightmare into which the people of Ashfar have been plunged. Their lives have changed beyond recognition in a few short minutes.

A character can close a random rift by using *dispel magic* or a similar spell such as *dimensional lock*. To close the rift successfully, he must succeed at a caster level check (DC 30). A steady rift cannot be closed with magic but it can be suppressed as if it were a magic item. Random rifts spontaneously wink out of existence 4d12 hours after creation.

Steady Rifts: A steady rift provides a continuous bridge between the Material Plane and another plane. These are the most dangerous, as they allow the fearful denizens of Hell and other hostile planes to enter the world without opposition. However, there are also steady rifts into the Heavens, and angels and other good outsiders are willing to help defend the world from the claws of the demons and devils.

Steady rifts do not spontaneously vanish the way random rifts do. Instead, they halve in size after periods of 2d6+6 hours. Each steady rift begins at 20 feet across, after which it shrinks to ten feet, then five, then disappears altogether.

Creatures that step through the rifts count as 'summoned' for the purposes of spells and other effects. They do not, however, gain the one-off ability to return to their home plane that a *summon* spell confers. If they wish to return home, they must head back through the rift or use their own magic to do so.

Entropic Fissures

An entropic fissure is similar to a rift but does not lead anywhere. It is a spreading patch of chaos in the fabric of reality which erodes reality around it. Unlike rifts, the fissures only appear in solid material. Fissures represent permanent damage to a plane, points where the planar material has been stressed beyond endurance and a form of critical breakdown has begun.

Ordinary entropic fissures vary in size from 5 to 25 feet across and resemble crevasses with crumbling edges, appearing in any surface and often across different surfaces. For example, an entropic fissure might begin in a road, run up to a house wall, cross it and spread to the roof. The contents of a fissure are dead black, with fizzing chaotic colours at the sides.

Fissures eat away at all materials that they touch, absorbing them completely. The entropy seems to devour stone and metal as quickly as wood. Any creature who comes into contact with a fissure must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 30) or contract ravening entropy.

Ravening entropy is effectively a magical disease with an instantaneous incubation period. It affects creatures who are immune to ordinary diseases. The symptoms are surreal and horrific. A blot of black chaos ringed with insane colours begins to eat away at the body, devouring more and more of it with each passing hour, like a form of horribly accelerated yet painless leprosy.

Each hour, the victim must make a further Fortitude saving throw as if fighting off a disease. A failed saving throw results in 1d4 Constitution drain and 1d4 Intelligence drain. Creatures who die of ravening entropy become babbling half-people before they finally perish, their bodies blurred and partially erased.

Ravening entropy can be healed with *remove disease* and similar magic, but the caster must succeed on a caster level check (DC 30) to purge it. Entropic fissures can be closed by *wish* or *miracle* spells, as well as by *mage's disjunction*. A planespider can also seal off an entropic fissure with its webbing.

Naturally, when the common people see angels and demons clashing in the streets, they think the End of Days has come. The Player Characters and their allies have an apocalypse on their hands.

Running the Planequake

During the planequake, the Player Characters are not handed any clear objectives. The crisis goes on all around them but there are no self-evident 'plot hooks' for them to latch onto. It is assumed that the Player Characters will want to use their own resources to find out what is going on. Since they are now epic characters, the Games Master can afford to give them this freedom.

Some players may find that this lack of prompting leaves them feeling stranded without any idea of what to do next, in which case the Games Master can present the events below in a more proactive manner (having contacts approach them to help) instead of having them happen while the Player Characters are going about their own investigations.

However they are presented, the following events give the Player Characters plenty to do during the initial stages of the planequake. They are a bridging section between the end of the last adventure and the summons from the Council of Xoth Sarandi.

The Unfolding Planequake: Celestials and Fiends

The following explanation of how the planequake unfolds should help the Games Master describe the event to the Player Characters as well as creating additional events in keeping with the theme.

Chaos Phase

The first phase, when the rifts open unexpectedly, is one of sheer chaos. There is panic in the streets and rioting as people try to crowd out of the cities where the rifts have opened. Outsiders, both intelligent and bestial, wander through the streets in a state of confusion. Strange scenes take place as tieflings walk into bars with their tails twitching, chaos beasts gibber in the town squares, angels spontaneously manifest in brothels, staggering earth elementals tread on cows and squash them flat and quasits run amok in clothes shops.

The onslaught phase only lasts for ten or twenty minutes, long enough for the more intelligent outsiders to take stock of what is happening. Nobody knows *why* this is going on but there is clearly fighting to be done.

Onslaught Phase

The outsiders into whose realms the rifts have opened begin to fight one another. The chaos of the first phase begins to polarise into organised sides. The bulk of the fighting is between good and evil entities, with lesser clashes taking place between lawful and chaotic factions. Demons and devils are less interested in fighting each other than in wiping out the celestials.

The fighting in the onslaught phase is opportunistic and disorganised. There are clear sides but nobody is in charge of them, nor do the sides seem to have any objectives yet. This lasts for around six hours.

Tactical Phase

The fighting continues but in a more organised, methodical manner than before. Each side begins to establish power bases. Outsiders fight to defend locales or invade them, rather than just counting coup. This is the longest phase, covering the time until the random rifts have mostly winked out and the steady rifts have begun to shrink.

Each side evolves different strategies. The celestials are more powerful in terms of raw strength and magical ability. Tactically, however, the fiends have the advantage, since the humanoid races of Ashfar are effectively hostages whom the celestials are unwilling to harm. By threatening innocents, the fiends can disrupt the celestials' battle plans. The celestials are courageous and altruistic, traits that the fiends exploit. Celestials defend their dependents to the death, whereas fiends are more likely to flee, since they are only interested in themselves.

The result of this is that the fiends deliberately terrorise the mortals in the hope that the celestials will take the bait and come to defend them. Many celestials do exactly this and are torn to pieces. Others volunteer to mislead the fiends, distracting them so that mortals can be led to safety, giving up their own lives to save them.

The celestials' battle plan is to prevent the fiends from reinforcing their armies. They set up protective cordons around the rifts into Hell, keeping watch and making sure no fiends can emerge. By the end of the first day of the planequake, the celestials have blockaded most of the rifts. The fiends are still able to reinforce their numbers through the few rifts that the celestials have not found. They also entrench in areas where there are large numbers of mortals to provide human shields. Castles, large houses and even schools are preferred.

Aftermath Phase

The aftermath phase begins when the steady rifts have shrunk to one-half their original size. The fiends realise that they will be stranded on the Material Plane if they do not head back to Hell. Some of the more chaotic fiends do not care about this, choosing to stay where they can wreak havoc; the devils are more disciplined and order a retreat.

The celestials now guard many of the rifts, so the fiends have to fight their way through. A few rifts are made to seem

unguarded but are actually traps for the fiends; the celestials dive upon them and wipe them out in droves.

The fiends who remain behind either opt for a scorched earth approach, laying waste to all around them and loving every minute of it, or find mortals to use as bargaining chips. Some fiends creep away into the underground cavern network, intending to find minions there and build up sanctuaries of power on the Material Plane. After all, the prospects in Hell are limited…

Event: That Is No Ordinary Troll (Chaos Phase)

The Player Characters are not the only heroes in the region. Fighters, paladins, rogues and other adventurers of all stripes aid the people to reach safety or seek glory by attacking the monstrous arrivals from other worlds. Unfortunately, what seems to be a familiar foe can prove to be something far, far worse.

The Player Characters encounter Alen, a stammering bard who seems to be in a state of total shock. He babbles nonsense, interjecting phrases like 'Help! The tentible terracles! The teberille tintacues! The tangible terrapins!'

If the Player Characters can calm him down, he manages to explain that the adventuring party he was with had ventured into a dungeon, where they encountered something that looked something like a troll but had terrible tentacles (a phrase he stumbles over). Expecting a fairly tough fight, they armed themselves with fire and acid, only to be torn to bits in twelve seconds. Alen fled to seek help.

The dungeon is not far away. It is a set of catacombs beneath a derelict chapel which have recently been infested with monsters. Alen's party was hired to clean them out. The adventurers were doing very well until they went down a set of stairs and entered the old ritual regalia storeroom.

The remains of that party (a paladin, a rogue and a wizard) now decorate an otherwise unremarkable 40-foot-square room. The bodies seem to have decayed far more quickly than they should have, since by Alen's account they were only killed a few hours ago.

The slithering, chuckling horror squatting in their midst is a tentacled pseudonatural troll, Squabatsulu, who emerged through a subterranean random rift and was delighted to encounter a band of humans who wanted to fight.

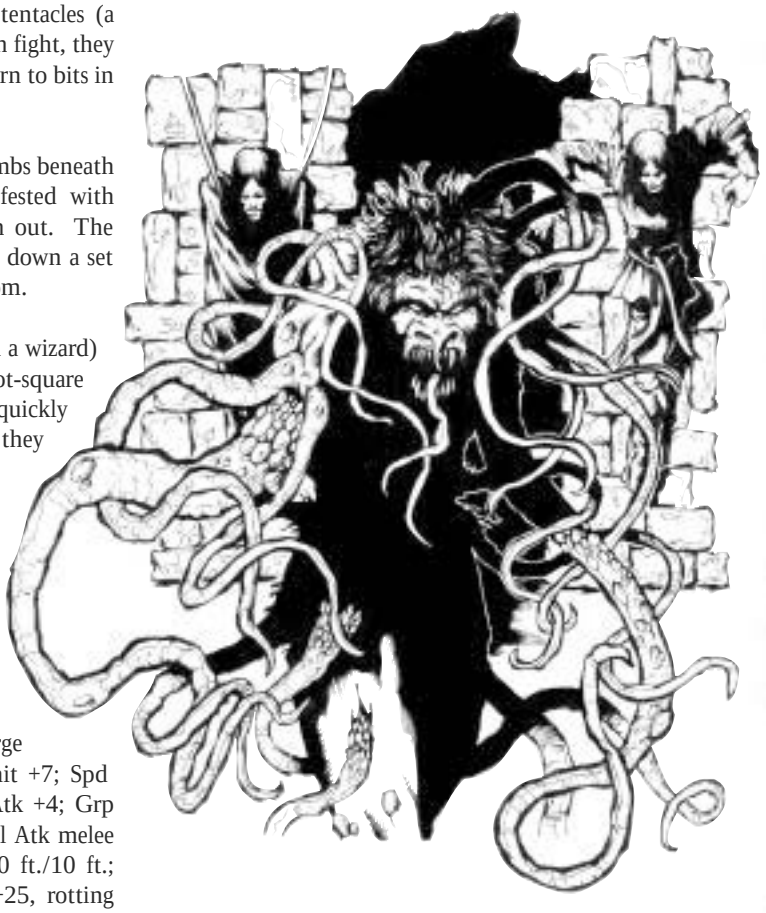
Squabatsulu, Pseudonatural Troll: CR 21; Large outsider (extraplanar); HD 6d8+66; hp 114; Init +7; Spd 60 ft.; AC 51, touch 16, flat-footed 44; Base Atk +4; Grp +40; Atk +35 melee (2d8+17, tentacle rake); Full Atk melee +35 (2d8+17, 5 tentacle rakes); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA constant insight, improved grab, rend 4d8+25, rotting constriction; SQ acid resistance 20, alternate form, damage reduction 5/epic, darkvision 90 ft., electricity resistance 20, regeneration 5, scent, spell resistance 30, spell-like abilities; AL CE; SV Fort +16, Ref +9, Will +8; Str 45, Dex 24, Con 33, Int 6, Wis 19, Cha 6.

Skills & Feats: Climb +26, Hide +16, Jump +38, Listen +15, Move Silently +16, Spot +15; Alertness, Iron Will, Track.

Alternate Form (Su): At will, Squabatsulu can take the form of a deformed baby's head with five chubby childlike arms beneath. The head's eyes roll moronically and the mouth smacks its lips and drools. Changing shape is a standard action. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against Squabatsulu when it is in this horrific form.

Constant Insight (Su): Squabatsulu makes all its attacks (including grapples) with a +15 insight bonus, which has already been calculated into the above statistics. It is not affected by the miss chance that applies to attacks against a concealed target.

Improved Grab (Ex): If Squabatsulu hits an opponent smaller than itself with a tentacle, it deals normal damage and may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.



Regeneration (Ex): Fire and acid deal normal damage to Squabatsulu. If it loses a tentacle or body part, the lost portion grows back in one minute. Squabatsulu can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump

Rend (Ex): If Squabatsulu hits with two or more tentacle rake attacks, it latches onto its opponent's body and tears its flesh. This attack automatically deals an additional 4d8+25 points of damage and can be used concurrently with its improved grab ability.

Rotting Constriction (Ex): Once Squabatsulu has hold of an opponent, each successful grapple check it makes during subsequent rounds automatically drains 2d4 points of Constitution. Each such drain heals Squabatsulu of 10 lost hit points.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *blur, dimension door, shield, unhallow.* The caster level is 20th and the saving throw DC is DC 8 + the spell's level. The DC is Charisma-based.

Event: Tavern of the Damned (Chaos Phase)

Without any coherent plan, the fiends behave like looters and bullies cast into a world where everyone is much weaker than them. The demons cause havoc at random and move on, while the devils are systematically brutal, staying in one place and terrorising the inhabitants. The demons, in short, act like pillaging raiders, while the devils behave like an occupying army.

A gang of devils has taken over a roadside inn. They are amusing themselves by forcing the patrons to wait on them and take part in grisly sports:

Inside, you see a scene of cosy tavern comfort transformed into something from a drunkard's dying madness. A huge devil with horns like a mountain goat is wedged into the corner, quaffing beer straight from the keg. Around him stand bearded devils and pale ice devils, cheering him on.

The decapitated bodies of customers hang upside down above the bar, tied to the roof beams by their ankles, with buckets underneath to catch the drippings. Other patrons have been pinned to the wall with barbaric weapons and used as knife-throwing targets. The body of a rotund man, possibly the innkeeper, lies on a table, blackened with flame and partly eaten. The carcass is horribly reminiscent of a roast ox.

A few surviving customers huddle in one corner, eyeing the door like some unattainable promise of salvation. One barmaid, clearly clinging to her sanity with an iron grip, brings the devils fresh tankards of beer. If she is afraid, she does not show it.

The barmaid is Lillandra, an ordinary woman who is simply refusing to crack. She knows that if she endures, the devils will consider her interesting and not kill her outright.

The leader of the devil band is Chaz'uloc, a horned devil. If the Player Characters enter, he assumes they are customers who are looking for shelter here, and grins broadly before inviting them to 'sit down and have a drink'. Some of the bearded devils then move to block off the exit, while the others bring the blood buckets across from the bar and present them to the Player Characters.

Chaz'uloc, Male Horned Devil: CR 16; Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful); HD 15d8+105; hp 172; Init +7; Spd 20 ft., fly 50 ft. (average); AC 35, touch 16, flat-footed 28; Base Atk +15; Grp +32; Atk +28 melee (2d6+19 plus stun, spiked chain) or +27 melee (2d6+13, claw) or +27 melee (2d6+13 plus infernal wound, tail); Full Atk +28/+23/+18 melee (2d6+19 plus stun, spiked chain) and +25 melee (2d8+6, bite) and +25 melee (2d6+6 plus infernal wound, tail); or +27 melee (2d6+13, 2 claws) and +25 melee (2d8+6, bite) and +25 melee (2d6+6 plus infernal wound, tail); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft. (20 ft. with spiked chain); SA fear aura, infernal wound, spell-like abilities, stun, *summon devil;* SQ damage reduction 10/good and silver, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire and poison, regeneration 5, resistance to acid 10 and cold 10, see in darkness, spell resistance 28, telepathy 100 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +16, Ref +16, Will +15; Str 31 (37), Dex 25, Con 25, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 22.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +24, Climb +31, Concentration +24, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +6 (+8 acting), Hide +21, Intimidate +26, Listen +22, Move Silently +23, Search +20, Sense Motive +22, Spot +22, Survival +4 (+6 following tracks); Cleave, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (spiked chain).

Fear Aura (Su): Chaz'uloc can radiate a 5-foot-radius fear aura as a free action. A creature in the area must succeed on a Will saving throw (DC 23) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell (caster level 15th). A creature who successfully saves cannot be affected again by Chaz'uloc's aura for 24 hours. Other devils are immune to the aura.

Infernal Wound (Su): The damage Chaz'uloc deals with his tail attack causes a persistent wound. An injured creature loses two additional hit points each round. The wound does not heal naturally and resists healing spells. The continuing hit point loss can be stopped by a Heal check (DC 24), a *cure* spell or a *heal* spell (caster level check (DC 24) needed). A successful Heal check automatically stops the continuing hit point loss as well as restoring hit points. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Regeneration (Ex): Chaz'uloc takes normal damage from good-aligned silvered weapons, and from spells or effects with the good descriptor.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *dispel chaos* (DC 21), *dispel good* (DC 21), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *magic circle against good, persistent image* (DC 21); 3/day –

fireball (DC 19), *lightning bolt* (DC 19). Caster level is 15th and the saving throw DCs are Charisma-based.

Stun (Su): Whenever Chaz'uloc hits with a spiked chain attack, the opponent must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 30) or be stunned for 1d4 rounds. The save DC is Strength-based.

Summon Devil (Sp): Once per day, Chaz'uloc can attempt to summon 2d10 lemures or 1d6 bearded devils with a 50% chance of success, 1d6 barbed devils with a 35% chance of success or another horned devil with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 6th level spell.

Equipment & Treasure: Belt of giant strength +6, spiked chain.

Ice Devils (4): CR 13; Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful); HD 14d8+84; hp 147; Init +5; Spd 40 ft.; AC 32, touch 14, flat-footed 27; Base Atk +14; Grp +24; Atk +20 melee (2d6+9/x3 plus slow, spear) or +19 melee (1d10+6, claw); Full Atk +20/+15/+10 melee (2d6+9/x3 plus slow, spear) and +14 melee (2d6+3, bite) and +14 melee (3d6+3 plus slow, tail); or +19 melee (1d10+6, 2 claws) and +14 melee (2d6+3, bite) and +14 melee (3d6+3 plus slow, tail); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA fear aura, slow, spell-like abilities, *summon devil*; SQ damage reduction 10/good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire and poison, regeneration 5, resistance to acid 10 and cold 10, see in darkness, spell resistance 25, telepathy 100 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +15, Ref +14, Will +15; Str 23, Dex 21, Con 23, Int 22, Wis 22, Cha 20.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +22, Climb +23, Concentration +23, Diplomacy +9, Disguise +5 (+7 acting), Intimidate +24, Jump +27, Knowledge (planes) +23, Listen +25, Move Silently +22, Search +23, Sense Motive +23, Spellcraft +23, Spot +25, Survival +6 (+8 following tracks); Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (spear).

Fear Aura (Su): An ice devil can radiate a 10-foot-radius fear aura as a free action. A creature in the area must succeed on a Will saving throw (DC 22) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell (caster level 13th). A creature who successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same ice devil's aura for 24 hours. Other devils are immune to the aura. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Regeneration (Ex): An ice devil is dealt normal damage from good-aligned weapons and from spells or effects with the good descriptor.

Slow (Su): An opponent hit by an ice devil's spear or tail attack must succeed on a Fortitude saving throw (DC 23) or be affected as though by a *slow* spell for 1d6 rounds. This is a cold effect. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *cone of cold* (DC 20), *fly, greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *ice storm* (DC 19), *persistent image* (DC 20), *unholy aura* (DC 23), *wall of ice* (DC 19). Caster level is 13th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Devil (Sp): Once per day an ice devil can attempt to summon 2d10 lemures or 1d6 bearded devils, 2d4 bone devils with a 50% chance of success, or another ice devil with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th level spell.

Equipment & Treasure: Spear.

Bearded Devils (12): CR 5; Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful); HD 6d8+18; 45 hp; Init +6; Spd 40 ft.; AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +6; Grp +8; Atk +9 melee (1d10+3 plus infernal wound, glaive) or +8 melee (1d6+2, claw); Full Atk +9/+4 melee (1d10+3 plus infernal wound, glaive) or +8 melee (1d6+2, 2 claws); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. (10 ft. with glaive); SA infernal wound, beard, battle frenzy, *summon devil*; SQ damage reduction 5/silver or good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire and poison, resistance to acid 10 and cold 10, see in darkness, spell resistance 17, telepathy 100 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +5; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Climb +11, Diplomacy +2, Hide +11, Listen +9, Move Silently +9, Sense Motive +9, Spot +9; Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (glaive).

Infernal Wound (Su): The damage a bearded devil deals with its glaive causes a persistent wound. An injured creature loses 2 additional hit points each round. The wound does not heal naturally and resists healing spells. The continuing hit point loss can be stopped by a DC 16 Heal check, a *cure* spell or a *heal* spell. However, a character attempting to cast a *cure* spell or a *heal* spell on a creature damaged by a bearded devil's glaive must succeed on a DC 16 caster level check, or the spell has no effect on the injured character. A successful Heal check automatically stops the continuing hit point loss as well as restoring hit points. The infernal wound is a supernatural ability of the bearded devil, not of the weapon. The check DC is Constitution-based.

Beard (Ex): If a bearded devil hits a single opponent with both claw attacks, it automatically hits with its beard. The affected creature takes 1d8+2 points of damage and must succeed on a DC 16 Fortitude save or be infected with a vile disease known as devil chills (incubation period 1d4 days, damage 1d4 Str). Damage is dealt each day until the afflicted creature succeeds on three consecutive Fortitude saves, the disease is cured magically or the creature dies. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Battle Frenzy (Ex): Twice per day, a bearded devil can work itself into a battle frenzy similar to the barbarian's rage (+4 Strength, +4 Constitution, +2 morale bonus on Will saves, –2 AC penalty). The frenzy lasts for 6 rounds and the bearded devil suffers no ill effects afterward.

Summon Devil (Sp): Once per day a bearded devil can attempt to summon 2d10 lemures with a 50% chance of success or another bearded devil with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3rd level spell.

Equipment & Treasure: Glaive.

Event: The Besieged Church (Onslaught Phase)

Two commoners, Markus and Darina Cumberpatch, brought their infant son to church this morning for his naming ceremony. The church is dedicated to a suitable non-evil deity, depending on where the Player Characters are. The planequake struck while the ceremony was taking place. When the congregation saw the fiends fly shrieking through the sky, the priest barred the doors of the church and told everyone to pray for divine assistance.

Now the church is surrounded by slavering demons who hurl mud and filth at the stained-glass windows and scratch their claws on the doors. Five hundred feet to the north of the church, hovering twenty feet above the ground, is a rift opening into Hell – specifically, into a chaotic evil part of Hell where winged fiends haunt cliffs of black glass that surround a white-hot lake of liquid lead.

The fiends who clambered from this rift could not resist attacking the church, as they love to see such things destroyed. However, it proved harder than they expected to break in. This has just made them more determined to destroy it. They have sent word back to senior demons, who are on their way.

Inside the church, around a hundred people cower in awe and terror. Their prayers, it seems, have been answered. Above the altar floats an angelic figure, a silver trumpet in its hand. This is the archon Suriel, who heard the infants screaming as she flew by and *teleported* into the church to comfort him.

She is maintaining her inherent *magic circle against evil* as an additional barrier to keep the fiends at bay, while telling the congregants to hold fast to their faith, because their gods will surely not abandon them. The church is a *hallowed* site (caster level 16th) but the fiends are growing in number and stronger ones are coming. They have almost broken through the doors.

Despite her words of consolation, Suriel fully expects to die in the coming fight. She is outnumbered and the fiends have a rift nearby. There are no other archons or angels at hand to help. All she can do is place herself between the congregation and the fiends for as long as possible.

The Fiends: The gathering crowd of fiends outside the church currently consists of around twenty quasits (who run back and watch from a safe distance if fighting begins), ten vrocks and three hezrou. After five rounds, the requested heavy artillery arrives in the form of a marilith commander named Pai'Chi. She begins battering away at the church's heavy oaken doors with all her longswords at once, screeching at the humans inside to 'come out and play' while her cohorts laugh. The door is rapidly hacked to splinters.

The Games Master can adjust the challenge of this encounter as it progresses. The church is (conveniently) situated next to a rift into Hell, so if the Player Characters have too easy a time of it, the fiends can send additional 'backup' such as a balor or two.

Alternatively, additional angels can arrive to help Suriel if the Player Characters are overwhelmed. Divination reveals that there is a planetar half a mile away who is helping heal the wounded. If a Player Character can reach the planetar, he can lend his strength to the fight – though reaching him through the crowds of fiends may be a problem.

Pai'Chi's Bargain: This is a combat-heavy encounter; if the Games Master wants more dialogue and roleplay, he can have Pai'Chi make an offer before the fighting begins in earnest. She promises to leave the humans alone so long as the archon comes out of the church and faces her in single combat. However, if Suriel does not come out, the demons will slaughter everyone, men, women and unbaptised children alike.

'The humans are not our enemies; the arrogant legions of Heaven are those we seek to rend! What say you, seraph? Do you dare to face your foe alone?'

Suriel knows that demons are chaotic and cannot be trusted, but being lawful herself, she is loath to back down from a direct challenge. If the Player Characters are willing to take on the roles of protectors, she goes to face Pai'Chi in single combat. This almost certainly leaves Suriel dead, after which the demons cackle at the stupid dead archon and smash their way into the church.

Vrocks (10): CR 9; Large outsider (chaotic, extraplanar, evil); HD 10d8+70; hp 115; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average); AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +10; Grp +20; Atk +15 melee (2d6+6, claw); Full Atk +15 melee (2d6+6, 2 claws) and +13 melee (1d8+3, bite) and +13 melee (1d6+3, 2 talons); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA dance of ruin, spell-like abilities, spores, stunning screech, *summon demon*; SQ damage reduction 10/good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 17, telepathy 100 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +14, Ref +9, Will +10; Str 23, Dex 15, Con 25, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +20, Diplomacy +5, Hide +11, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (the planes) +15, Listen +24, Move Silently +15, Search +15, Sense Motive +16, Spellcraft +15, Spot +24, Survival +3 (+5 following tracks); Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Multiattack, Power Attack.

Note: Vrocks have a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Equipment & Treasure: To use this ability, a group of at least three vrocks must join hands in a circle, dancing wildly and chanting. At the end of three rounds of dancing, a wave of crackling energy flashes outward in a 100-foot radius. All creatures except for demons within the radius are dealt 20d6 points of damage, with a Reflex saving throw allowed for half damage (DC 18). Stunning, paralysing or slaying one of the vrocks stops the dance. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Equipment & Treasure: At will – *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *mirror image*, *telekinesis* (DC 18); 1/day – *heroism*. Caster level is 12th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Spores (Ex): A vrock can release masses of spores from its body once every three rounds as a free action. The spores automatically deal 1d8 points of damage to all adjacent creatures. They then penetrate the skin and grow, dealing an additional 1d4 points of damage each round for ten rounds. At the end of this time, the victim is covered with a tangle of viny growths. The vines are harmless and wither away in 1d4 days. A *delay poison* spell stops the spores' growth for its duration. *Bless*, *neutralise poison* or *remove disease* kills the spores, as does sprinkling the victim with a vial of holy water.

Stunning Screech (Su): Once per hour a vrock can emit a piercing screech. All creatures except for demons within a 30-foot radius must succeed on a Fortitude saving throw (DC 22) or be stunned for one round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day a vrock can attempt to summon 2d10 dretches or another vrock with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3rd level spell.

Hezrou (3): CR 11; Large outsider (chaotic, extraplanar, evil); HD 10d8+93; hp 138; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 23, touch 9, flat-footed 23; Base Atk +10; Grp +19; Atk +14 melee (4d4+5, bite); Full Atk +14 melee (4d4+5, bite) and +9 melee (1d8+2, 2 claws); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA improved grab, spell-like abilities, stench, *summon demon;* SQ damage reduction 10/good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 19, telepathy 100 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +16, Ref +7, Will +9; Str 21, Dex 10, Con 29, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 18.

Skills & Feats: Climb +18, Concentration +22, Escape Artist +13, Hide +13, Intimidate +17, Listen +23, Move Silently +13, Search +15, Spellcraft +15, Spot +23, Survival +2 (+4 following tracks), Use Rope +0 (+2 with bindings); Blind-Fight, Cleave, Power Attack, Toughness.

Note: Hezrous have a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a hezrou must hit with both claw attacks. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *chaos hammer* (DC 18), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *unholy blight* (DC 18); 3/day – *blasphemy* (DC 21), *gaseous form*. Caster level is 13th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Stench (Ex): When a hezrou fights, any living creature (except other demons) within ten feet must succeed on a Fortitude saving throw (DC 24) or be nauseated for as long as it remains within the affected area and for 1d4 rounds afterwards. Creatures who successfully save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. A creature who successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same hezrou's stench for 24 hours. A *delay poison* or *neutralise poison* spell removes either condition from one creature. Creatures who have immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonuses on their saving throws. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day a hezrou can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches or another hezrou with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th level spell.

Pai'Chi, Female Marilith: CR 17; Large outsider (chaotic, extraplanar, evil); HD 16d8+144; hp 216; Init +4; Spd 40 ft.; AC 29, touch 13, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +16; Grp +29; Atk +26 melee (2d6+10/19–20, *+1 longsword of unholy power*) or +24 melee (1d8+9, slam) or +24 melee (4d6+9, tail slap); Full Atk +26/+21/+16/+11 melee (2d6+10/19–20, *+1 longsword of unholy power*) and +25 melee (2d6+4/19–20, 5 longswords) and +22 melee (4d6+4, tail slap) or +24 melee (1d8+9, 6 slams) and +22 melee (4d6+4, tail slap); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA constrict 4d6+13, improved grab, spell-like abilities, *summon demon*; SQ damage reduction 10/good and cold iron, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 25, telepathy 100 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +19, Ref +14, Will +14; Str 29, Dex 19, Con 29, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 24.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +26, Concentration +28, Diplomacy +30, Disguise +7 (+9 acting), Hide +19, Intimidate +28, Listen +31, Move Silently +23, Search +23, Sense Motive +23, Spellcraft +23 (+25 scrolls), Spot +31, Survival +4 (+6 following tracks), Use Magic Device +26 (+28 scrolls); Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Multiattack, Multiweapon Fighting, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Note: Pai'Chi has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Constrict (Ex): Pai'Chi deals 4d6+13 points of damage with a successful grapple check. The constricted creature must succeed on a Strength-based Fortitude saving throw (DC 27) or lose consciousness for as long as it remains in the coils and for 2d4 rounds thereafter.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Pai'Chi must hit with her tail slap attack. She can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If she succeeds on the grapple check, she can constrict.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *align weapon, blade barrier* (DC 25), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *magic weapon, polymorph, project image* (DC 25), *see invisibility, telekinesis* (DC 24), *unholy aura* (DC 27). Caster level is 16th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day, Pai'Chi can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches, 1d4 hezrou or one nalfeshnee with a 50% chance of success, or one glabrezu or another marilith with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 5th level spell.

True Seeing (Su): Pai'Chi has continuous *true seeing* as the spell, caster level 16th.

Equipment & Treasure: +1 longsword of unholy power (epic), *cloak of charisma +4*, longswords (5).

Pai'Chi has almond eyes, a mane of neon pink hair and a strangely sweet expression for a demon. She is highly favoured among the balors for her inventiveness and enthusiasm when it comes to spreading evil.

One of her favourite tactics is to pretend to have a merciful streak, implying to foes that she is not altogether evil and could potentially be persuaded to spare her victims, then butchering them when they let their guards down. She loves to build up hope and then dash it again. When Pai'Chi is being truly playful, her prey takes a long time to die. Those slicing, dicing swords can remove many extremities before a creature finally bleeds to death.

Suriel, Female Trumpet Archon: CR 14; Medium outsider (extraplanar, good, lawful); HD 12d8+72; hp 126; Init +7; Spd 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good); AC 27, touch 13, flat-footed 24; Base Atk +12; Grp +17; Atk +21 melee (2d6+11/19–20, *+4 greatsword*); Full Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (2d6+11/19–20, *+4 greatsword*); SA spell-like abilities, spells, trumpet; SQ aura of menace, damage reduction 10/evil, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and petrification, magic circle against evil, spell resistance 29, teleport, tongues; AL LG; SV Fort +14 (+18 against poison), Ref +11, Will +11; Str 20, Dex 17, Con 23, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +21, Diplomacy +20, Escape Artist +18, Handle Animal +18, Knowledge (planes) +18, Listen +18, Move Silently +18, Perform (wind instruments) +18, Ride +20, Sense Motive +18, Spot +18, Use Rope +3 (+5 with bindings); Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Power Attack.

Aura of Menace (Su): Any hostile creature within a 20-foot radius of Suriel must succeed on a Will saving throw (DC 21) to resist her aura. Those who fail take a –2 penalty on attacks, Armour Class and saving throws for 24 hours or until they successfully hit Suriel. A creature who has resisted or broken the effect cannot be affected by Suriel's aura again for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *continual flame, detect evil, message.* Caster level is 12th.

Spells: Suriel casts divine spells as a 14th level cleric. She has the Law and Good domains.

Trumpet (Su): Suriel can emit a paralysing blast from her trumpet. All creatures except archons within 100 feet of the blast must succeed on a Fortitude saving throw (DC 19) or be paralysed for 1d4 rounds. Suriel can also command her trumpet to become a *+4 greatsword* as a free action. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Spells prepared (6/6+1/6+1/5+1/4+1/3+1/3+1/2+1, save DC 13 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, light, purify food and drink, read magic, resistance* (2); 1st – *bless* (2), *divine favour* (2), *protection from chaos*, sanctuary, shield of faith*; 2nd – *aid*, bull's strength* (2), *consecrate, lesser restoration, owl's wisdom* (2); 3rd – *daylight, invisibility purge, magic circle against chaos*, magic vestment, protection from energy* (2); 4th – *dismissal, divine power, holy smite*, neutralise poison, spell immunity;* 5th – *dispel evil* (2), mass cure light wounds, plane shift;* 6th – *banishment, blade barrier*, heal, undeath to death;* 7th – *dictum*, holy word, mass cure serious wounds.*

*Domain spell.

Equipment & Treasure: Silver trumpet/*+4 greatsword*.

If the Player Characters manage to drive the fiends away and save the assembled citizens, Suriel thanks them formally but sincerely and flies off to find more of her fellow archons. These form a defensive perimeter around the open rift, guarding it against any further incursions from Hell.

Event: Mob Justice (Tactical Phase)

Now that the celestials have the fiends limited to set areas, it is time for the people to take action. Something must have caused this evil magic; brute force and ignorance look for the closest suitable scapegoat.

A crowd of angry citizens has taken the opportunity to drag an infamous local witch, Old Witherwort, from her cottage and into the town square to be hung. Only the crowd's strength of numbers has made this possible, as the witch is an advanced adept and could easily have escaped had she not been taken by surprise.

Although she has nothing to do with the planequake, Old Witherwort is genuinely evil through and through. She has worked mischief for years, taking money to place curses on people and taking even more money to lift them again. The local populace has become too intimidated to do anything about it. Ironically, if it had not been for the planequake erupting all around them, the people would never have mustered the courage to deal with her. Now that their lives are in obvious danger, they have forgotten their fear.

Unfortunately, the summary execution has run into a hitch. Outsiders of all kinds are roaming the material world, including entities from planes of law. The townspeople are being baulked by a zelekhut, Mortigan the Equilibrious, who insists that the suspected witch should be given a fair trial. He is not willing to let the people execute her just because they want to. This is not going down well. As far as the people are concerned, they have plenty of evidence and this 'damn do-gooder clockwork centaur' is endangering them all by letting her live. Meanwhile, Old Witherwort laughs toothlessly at all of this.

The citizens ask the Player Characters to intervene. There is a witch to hang and Hell cannot be allowed anymore allies, especially with these gateways opening all over the place.

If the Player Characters attack or seriously inconvenience Mortigan, they earn the wrath of the Inevitables. Divisions of kolyarut, in batteries of ten, are dispatched to deal with them. If these fail, a mithral golem is sent on the same errand; if this too fails to eradicate them, the Inevitables stay their hand for the moment.

Mortigan the Equilibrious, Male Zelekhut: CR 9; Large construct (extraplanar, lawful); HD 8d10+30; hp 74; Init +0; Spd 35 ft., fly 40 ft. (average); AC 27, touch 9, flat-footed 27; Base Atk +6; Grp +15; Atk +10 melee (2d6+5 plus 1d6 electrical, spiked chain); Full Atk +10/+5 melee and +10 melee (2d6+5 plus 1d6 electrical, 2 spiked chains); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA spell-like abilities; SQ construct traits, damage reduction 10/chaotic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 5, low-light vision, spell resistance 20; AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 21, Dex 11, Con —, Int 10, Wis 17, Cha 15.

Skills & Feats: Diplomacy +4, Listen +9, Search +9, Sense Motive +12, Spot +9, Survival +3 (+5 following tracks); Great Fortitude, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge.

Note: Mortigan has a +4 racial bonus on Search and Sense Motive checks.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *dimensional anchor*, *dispel magic*, *fear* (DC 16), *hold person* (DC 15), *locate creature*, *true seeing*; 3/day – *hold monster* (DC 17), *mark of justice*; 1/week – *lesser geas* (DC 16). Caster level is 8th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Equipment & Treasure: Spiked chains (2), plate barding.

Old Witherwort, Female Human Adp20: CR 19; Medium humanoid; HD 20d6-17; hp 53; Init +5; Spd 30 ft; AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +10; Grp +10; Atk +10 melee (1d4/19–20, dagger); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d4/19–20, dagger); SA scry on familiar, spells; AL CE; SV Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +16; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 13, Wis 18, Cha 15.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +4, Concentration +14, Craft (herbalism) +13, Handle Animal +13, Heal +16, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (local) +13, Listen +6, Spellcraft +14, Spot +6, Survival +15; Alertness[B], Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Empower Spell, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Necromancy).

Spells prepared (3/4/4/4/4/2, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *touch of fatigue*; 1st – *cause fear*, *detect good*, *endure elements*, *obscuring mist*; 2nd – *animal trance*, *darkness*, *invisibility*, *web*; 3rd – *animate dead*, *bestow curse*, *contagion*, *lightning bolt*; 4th – *minor creation*, *stoneskin* (2), *wall of fire*; 5th – *baleful polymorph* (2).

Equipment & Treasure: Dagger, *wand of contagion* (confiscated by mob).

Witherwort is the classic cackling crone of folklore. Her familiar, Lankity Hop-Toe, is a toad:

Lankity Hop-Toe, Toad Familiar: CR -; Diminutive magical beast; HD 20d6; hp 26; Init +1; Spd 5 ft.; AC 25, touch 15, flat-footed 24; Base Atk +10; Grp -7; Atk +12 melee (no damage, touch); Full Atk +12/+7 melee (no damage, touch); Space/Reach 1 ft./0 ft.; SA deliver touch spells; SQ amphibious, empathic link, improved evasion, low-light vision, share spells, speak with amphibians, speak with master, spell resistance 25; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +14; Str 1, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 4.

Skills & Feats: Hide +21, Listen +4, Spot +4; Alertness.

Event: A Fiend in Chains (Tactical Phase)

Ordinary people are not without resources when their world is invaded. They may not be mighty heroes but with bravery and cunning they can still prevail. This event can be set in a city location or a small town.

A group of buildings surrounds a courtyard, in the centre of which is a pillory. Bound to this is a young woman with long red hair and astonishingly beautiful features. She screams a series of vile profanities, raging against her captors and demanding to be set free. There is nobody present to hear her. You notice that she is bound to the pillory with iron chains.

A group of volunteers, along with a band of guardsmen, have prepared a trap for the fiends. The woman bound in the courtyard is Lashelle, a succubus using her *alter self* ability to assume human form (though her torrent of obscenities is a clue to her demonic nature). The guardsmen captured her with the help of a group of adventurers who have since left to help other people since this situation is under control.

The townsfolk wait behind the shuttered windows on the top storeys of the buildings. As soon as the succubus' fellow demons come to rescue her, the windows will be flung open and a hail of crossbow bolts tipped with cold iron barbs will thud into them. The townsfolk were careful to enter the buildings from the other side so the succubus would not see what they were doing and realise that it was a trap.

Such is the plan, at least. If the succubus sees the Player Characters, she begs them to release her, claiming that the idiotic, superstitious commoners have locked her up here in the belief that she is a demon. *'I don't know why they thought that. Maybe it was the hair.'* If the Player Characters see through this deception, she rages at them for a round or two, then begins to threaten them with her 'master':

'Listen, pathetic apes. You can keep me chained up all day. For all you know, I enjoy it. But I have friends in very, very low places. They are going to come looking for me. If Ranthallian finds me like this, he'll tear down all these buildings, and the people inside, and their children, and their pets. I'm his favourite. You don't want to mess with Ranthallian. Anyway, why should you? This isn't really your problem, is it? You let me go and I'll say nothing. Who knows, I might even be nice to you. I can be very nice, when I'm in a good mood.'

The Player Characters can chew over their options for as long as the Games Master feels appropriate. Meanwhile, the guardsmen behind the shutters mutter under their breath and hope the Player Characters go away, so that the other demons will come and they can cut them down.

There are several ways this event can go. If the Player Characters simply kill the helpless Lashelle, the guardsmen are furious with them and may even start a fight. Some of them were looking forward to the glory of killing a demon or two. If the Player Characters set her free, the same thing may happen; Lashelle forgets her promise of 'being nice' once she can fly away.

The Wrath of Ranthallian: If the Player Characters sense that this is a trap or simply take too long to make up their minds about what to do, Ranthallian does indeed arrive to fetch his favourite concubine. The brave volunteers have bitten off much, much more than they can chew. As the flaming form of the balor Ranthallian lopes around the corner and into view, they decide that they may just stay behind their shutters and let the Player Characters take care of this one. If he is not stopped, Ranthallian snaps Lashelle's chains like threads, smacks her once for being stupid enough to get caught, and then proceeds to lay waste to the surrounding buildings (and their occupants, and their children, and their pets).

Lashelle's statistics are given here not because she is a significant threat to the Player Characters but because combat may break out around her. The guardsmen who surround the courtyard and wait behind the shutters, peeping through them to see if

any demons come, are 3rd level human warriors. There are 12 of them in total.

Lashelle, Succubus: CR 9; Medium outsider (chaotic, extraplanar, evil); HD 12d8+24; hp 78; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average); AC 21, touch 12, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +12; Grp +13; Atk +13 melee (1d6+1, claw); Full Atk +13 melee (1d6+1, 2 claws); SA energy drain, spell-like abilities, *summon demon*; SQ damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 20, telepathy 100 ft., tongues; AL CE; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +10; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 26.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +28, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +20, Disguise +23 (+27 acting), Escape Artist +10, Hide +10, Intimidate +27, Knowledge (the planes) +12, Listen +25, Move Silently +10, Search +12, Spot +25, Survival +10 (+12 following tracks), Use Rope +11 (+13 with bindings); Ability Focus (Energy Drain), Dodge, Mobility, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Bluff).

Note: Lashelle has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. While using her *alter self* ability, Lashelle gains a +10 circumstance bonus on Disguise checks.

Energy Drain (Su): Lashelle's kiss bestows one negative level, which requires a Fortitude saving throw (DC 25) to remove. If the target is not willing to be kissed, she must start a grapple, which provokes an attack of opportunity. The kiss also has the effect of a *suggestion* spell, asking the victim to accept another kiss. The victim must succeed on a Will saving throw (DC 25) to negate the effect of the *suggestion*. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *charm monster* (DC 22), *detect good*, *detect thoughts* (DC 20), *ethereal jaunt* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *polymorph* (humanoid form only, no limit on duration), *suggestion* (DC 21). Caster level is 12th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day, Lashelle can attempt to summon one vrock with a 30% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3rd level spell.

Tongues (Su): Lashelle has a permanent *tongues* ability (as the spell, caster level 12th).

Ranthallian, Male Balor: CR 23; Large outsider (chaotic, extraplanar, evil); HD 26d8+260; hp 377; Init +11; Spd 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good); AC 35, touch 16, flat-footed 28; Base Atk +26; Grp +43; Atk +40 melee (2d6+14/17–20, *+1 vorpal longsword*); Full Atk +38/+33/+28/+23 melee (2d6+14/17–20, *+1 vorpal longsword*) and +37/+32 melee (1d4+7 plus 1d6 fire plus entangle, *+1 flaming whip*) or +38 melee (1d10+13, 2 slams); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft. (20 ft. with *+1 flaming whip*); SA death throes, entangle, spell-like abilities, *summon demon*, vorpal sword; SQ damage reduction 15/cold iron and good, darkvision 60 ft., flaming body, immunity to electrical damage, fire and poison, resistance to acid 10 and cold 10, spell resistance 31, telepathy 100 ft., true seeing; AL CE; SV Fort +25, Ref +22, Will +22; Str 36, Dex 25, Con 31, Int 24, Wis 24, Cha 26.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +37, Concentration +39, Diplomacy +45, Disguise +37 (+41 acting), Hide +32, Intimidate +41, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (the planes) +36, Listen +44, Move Silently +36, Search +36, Sense Motive +36, Spellcraft +40 (+44 scrolls), Spot +44, Survival +7 (+11 following tracks), Use Magic Device +37 (+41 scrolls); Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*telekinesis*), Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Note: Balors have a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Death Throes (Ex): If killed, Ranthallian explodes in a blinding flash of light that deals 100 points of damage to anything within 100 feet and destroys his weapons; a Reflex save (DC 33) is allowed for half damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Entangle (Ex): Ranthallian's *+1 flaming whip* can entangle foes. It has 20 hit points and needs no folding. If it hits, the target and Ranthallian immediately make opposed Strength checks; if Ranthallian wins, he drags the target against his flaming body (see below), where it remains anchored in the flames until it escapes the whip.

Flaming Body (Su): Ranthallian's body is wreathed in flame. Anyone grappling him is dealt 6d6 points of fire damage each round.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *blasphemy* (DC 25), *dominate monster* (DC 27), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *insanity* (DC 25), *power word stun*, *telekinesis* (DC 23), *unholy aura* (DC 26); 1/day – *fire storm* (DC 26), *implosion* (DC 27). The caster level is 20th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day, Ranthallian can automatically summon 4d10 dretches, 1d4 hezrous or one nalfeshnee, glabrezu, marilith or balor. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th level spell.

True Seeing (Su): Ranthallian has a continuous *true seeing* ability, as the spell (caster level 20th).

Equipment & Treasure: +1 flaming whip, +1 vorpal longsword.

Event: The Frightened Demon (Aftermath Phase)

Fiends are often arrogant and brutal, especially around mortals. Sometimes, though, they encounter threats that are beyond their comprehension, against which their hellborn strength is useless.

Cowering on the side of the road, its eyes wide with fear, is the bloated, toadlike form of a hezrou demon. The rift nearby has dwindled in size to a few feet across but the lights of Hell can still be seen flickering through it. The demon holds its hand behind its body, as if to hide a weapon. It grimaces at you but makes no move to attack.

The demon hails from an upper level of Hell, where the planequake has caused some disruption. It has contracted ravening entropy from an entropic fissure. Ironically, it came through the rift in the hope of escaping the planequake.

The ravening entropy has eaten most of its right arm, a fact that the demon tries to hide from the Player Characters. It desperately wants to go home but the rift has grown too small and now it is stranded here, alone on a hostile world, with a force even more chaotic than itself devouring it alive. It tries to threaten the Player Characters, bargain with them, offer them power and wealth – in short, bluff as much as it possibly can – all in the hope of being sent home.

It can provide the following information, if the Player Characters are in a parleying mood:

- Whatever the other fiends may be saying, Hell has indeed been struck by the planequake.
- The demon contracted this devouring sickness from a black, jagged crack that was spreading through a mountain. It looked like the demon's arm does now: a core of blackness with lights fizzing feverishly at the edges.

Hezrou statistics are given on page 32. This hezrou has suffered five points of Constitution drain and two points of Intelligence drain.

Non-Player Character Group: The Planespiders

The Player Characters may remember the planespiders from *The Drow War, Book Two: The Dying of the Light*. They are a race of sentient mechanical creatures whose self-appointed role is to patch holes in reality with their magical webs.

As might be expected with the planequake causing such severe disruption, the planespiders have gone into overdrive. They are scuttling into all the worlds they can reach, patching, binding and sealing for all they are worth. However, there are still only a finite number of them and they cannot be everywhere at once.

The Player Characters are likely to encounter an overworked planespider or two on their travels. The citizens quickly realise that the planespiders are trying to fix the problem and petition them for help; the fiends smash them to bits so that the gates to Hell will stay open; the angels politely request the planespiders stay away from the gates to the Heavens or else they will not be able to enter the world and fight the fiends.

Word from the High Council

At a suitable stage in the proceedings, the High Council of Xoth Sarandi contacts the Player Characters. This will most likely be through a *dream* spell provided by Nimian Archimandrus, head of the Conclave of Mages that assisted the Player Characters in the second *Drow War* campaign. The High Council has this to say:

'A delegation from the Heavenly Host has formally presented itself to us. They wish to speak with the Starborn concerning the current crisis. Since it was an earlier version of this Council that caused the Starborn to come into being, the angels turned to us as the natural point of contact. We are sorry to summon you to us so peremptorily, but our city is the most secure on Ashfar at present and the celestials do not wish to have this discussion elsewhere. Please make your way to Xoth Sarandi at your earliest convenience.'

Owing to the high proportion of wizards in the population, Xoth Sarandi is relatively free from rifts; random rifts have been located and dispelled, while steady rifts already have garrisons of celestials stationed beside them. The celestials have decided that Xoth Sarandi is the most sensible place to establish a power base during the planequake, as the sea-portals will allow people from all over the world to seek sanctuary there.

Problems with Mhorannan: If the Player Characters have Mhorannan with them, he is not allowed into Xoth Sarandi if his race is at all obvious. If they arrive by ship, the dock guards detain him in the jailhouse; if they *teleport* in, he is arrested on sight. Drow are *persona non grata* in Xoth Sarandi, especially with the planequake going on.

Plot Event: A Convocation of Angels

The Player Characters find the High Council in the company of nine glorious figures, their heads bowed and their wings folded. The council chambers resemble a gilded page from an illustrated book of legends.

The Council makes formal introductions: the spokesman for the angels is Melandrith, archangel of the Sun; his companions are eight planetars, angels of the spheres. Bowing in respect, the Council takes its leave and the Player Characters are left alone with the celestials.

Melandrith explains the angels' view of the situation:

'Heroes of the mortal realm, we salute you. Your deeds are spoken of in Heaven as they are on Earth. Know this first: we do not lay any claim to you. Your souls are yours alone, your fates up to you to determine as you see fit. We wish only to counsel, to advise and to ensure that you will not oppose us in our work.

'There is no doubt as to the nature of the crisis we face. Certain of the planes have been shaken from their places. This has happened before and will happen again. Men have called the event a 'planequake'. Though the event is, in itself, no more malicious than a storm is, the foul forces of Hell have used it for their own ends. They have surged through the rents between the worlds and infected this plane. We shall not allow this to happen.

'It is conceivable that some agency as yet unknown has caused this planequake; it may be an accident, or a deliberate attack, or an attempt to cause chaos. It may even be the commencement of the foretold apocalypse in which Hell shall rise to challenge Heaven, as it is written in the Eschatonic Scripts. Without knowledge, we are all walking in darkness. We must therefore turn to those who know.

'Our kind walk upon many worlds; we speak to the wise and learned people who dwell there, blessing them and giving them protection. Your world is not the only one to be stricken. You would do well to work with the heroes of other worlds if you are to aid yours.

'Of all the sages on all the worlds, the wisest and the most learned are the Philosophers of Arithmea. Their chief professor, Lord Fnut, is presently engaged in a project that will identify the cause of the planequake and prevent further disruption. We suggest most strongly that as soon as travel between the planes becomes safe once more, you seek out Lord Fnut on the plane of Arithmea and present yourselves to him with our recommendation. He shall surely provide you with assistance, for your world and his face a common threat.

'We can offer no further assistance than this. Our place is here, defending the innocent from the infernal.'

Melandrith the Archangel, Male Solar: CR 23; Large outsider (angel, extraplanar, good); HD 22d8+110; hp 209; Init +9; Spd 50 ft., fly 150 ft. (good); AC 35, touch 14, flat-footed 30; Base Atk +22; Grp +35; Atk +35 melee (3d6+18/19–20, *+5 dancing greatsword*) or +28 ranged (2d6+7/x3 plus slaying, *+2 composite longbow* (+5 Str bonus)) or +30 melee (2d8+13, slam); Full Atk +35/+30/+25/+20 melee (3d6+18/19–20, *+5 dancing greatsword*) or +28/+23/+18/+13 ranged (2d6+7/x3 plus slaying, *+2 composite longbow* (+5 Str bonus)) or +30 melee (2d8+13, slam); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA spell-like abilities, spells; SQ damage reduction 15/epic and evil, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, immunity to acid, cold and petrification, protective aura, regeneration 15, resistance to electrical 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 32, tongues; AL LG; SV Fort +18 (+22 against poison), Ref +18, Will +20; Str 28, Dex 20, Con 20, Int 23, Wis 25, Cha 25.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +30, Knowledge (planes) +33, Diplomacy +34, Escape Artist +30, Hide +26, Listen +32, Move Silently +30, Search +31, Sense Motive +32, Spellcraft +31, Spot +32, Survival +7 (+9 following tracks), Use Rope +5 (+7 with bindings); Cleave, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Mobility, Power Attack, Track.

Equipment & Treasure: +2 composite longbow, *+5 dancing greatsword*, arrows (20).

Melandrith resembles a powerfully built black-skinned human with eyes of flaming gold and wings the colour of molten brass.

Discussions with Melandrith: Melandrith is adamant on the subject of defending Ashfar from the fiends. He does not intend to go off looking for the cause of the planequake. That is for the Player Characters to do. He has business to take care of right here in the world.

If the Player Characters demand to know why the angels will not give them any more practical help in their quest, he responds:

'I understand your concerns. However, the highest heavens are exempt from this 'planequake', as men call it. It seems that the deepest hells are similarly unmoved. Only the middle ground has been shaken and laid open to both sides. For all we know, this is indeed the time appointed, when the world shall become the Shulannich Rho'Hadrin, the Field of Innocent Blood. There is no want of prophecy to that effect.

'Would you ask us to desert our posts in the midst of the apocalypse? We, the shining host? Our place is here, fighting our ancient enemies. The legions of Hell shall not prevail.'

Event: Old Friends

While they are in Xoth Sarandi, the Player Characters will probably want to catch up with Nimian Archimandrus, Azbeth, Cadrivaine and Cadfannan, the elven mages who acted as advisors during the events of The *Drow War, Book Two.* This reunion is mainly a roleplaying opportunity, allowing the Player Characters to recap their activities in downtime and bring their current situation into focus.

The Conclave has, of course, not been idle during the planequake. Its members have used their knowledge of the planes and various magical means, such as *scrying*, to try to divine its cause. They feel that the most important question is one that nobody is asking: does this crisis have anything to do with the drow or with the power they serve, the Dark? How might the destruction of the Abyssal Altar a year ago have caused the planes to jar out of alignment now? The Conclave supplies the following information and opinions:

- It *is* possible to destroy an entire plane by an act of magic. Gods are believed to be capable of it, but mortals have also accomplished it. Legends recount that the half-fiend sorcerer Abora Sokos annihilated a private plane belonging to a rival sorcerer, Jangaugle of the Lip, on learning that this plane was the love retreat of Jangaugle and Sokos' wife. It is said that Sokos engineered an epic spell to destroy the plane, which took him a whole year of research to produce. It is also said that he destroyed himself when he blew the plane to pieces, as he had no means of retreat. What was left behind was a void through which rolled black crumbling matter, much like the nothingness left after the destruction of Sakurafu. However, the planequake that resulted was extremely minor, and most records do not even mention it.

- A group of renegade drow calling themselves the Threnody in Velvet have been trying to make contact with the Conclave. Bats with messages tied to them have flapped into the Conclave's chambers after long overseas journeys and died on the carpet from exhaustion. The Conclave has ignored this as an obvious drow trick. If the Player Characters present Mhorannan to them, the Conclave members are aghast and refuse to discuss the planequake any further in Mhorannan's presence without *extremely* good reason.

- The Conclave has heard of the Philosophers of Arithmea. They have a reputation for being a stuffy, isolationist, cerebral bunch. Even so, it is hard to imagine anyone better qualified to explain the mystery of the planequake.

Arithmea

If the Player Characters decide to follow Melandrith's advice and look for the Philosophers of Arithmea, they end up travelling to the plane. The Conclave can supply the necessary material components for a *plane shift* to Arithmea (a tuned metal fork) or the Player Characters can develop these themselves with a Knowledge (the planes) skill check (DC 30).

The plane of Arithmea has the following traits:

- Mildly neutral-aligned.

- Self-contained shape. Travelling for fifty miles in any one direction in Arithmea brings one back to where one started.

- Enhanced magic. Spells and spell-like abilities of the Divination school of magic are maximised as if the Maximise Spell metamagic feat had been used on them. The spells do not, however, require higher-level slots. Spells and spell-like abilities that are already maximised are unaffected by this benefit.

- The outcrops of masonry on Arithmea (see below) are suffused with a strong feeling of calm and sanity. This acts as a *calm emotions* spell, affecting all creatures entering these areas for as long as they remain there and for 1d4 rounds afterwards (caster level 30th, Will saving throw DC 17). Confused or insane creatures have their states of confusion suppressed (but not removed) while they remain in the area.

Arriving at Arithmea gives no clue as to where Lord Fnut or the other philosophers may be:

The plane of Arithmea is pleasing to the eye. Blue skies and bluer seas extend to the horizon, with islands of white breaking the water's surface. Each island appears to be composed wholly of masonry, even below the waterline, as if the entire world is made from worked stone that has somehow become submerged but for a few islands.

The structures are not isolated buildings but a single architectural immensity with many domed, slanting or peaked roofs, beneath which lie colonnades, battlements, pavements raised and sunken, open squares with statues or sundials in them, balconies, avenues and a thousand other crafted features. The stone seems weathered and old but quite sound.

There is no discernible pattern to the building, nor is it at all clear what the functions of the different sections may be. It is as if a band of slightly deranged yet talented gods had conspired to cover every square foot of the plane with architecture for no other reason than the sheer joy of building.

Exploring Arithmea

The Player Characters can explore the islands of masonry if they wish. They soon discover that the structures do not penetrate deeply into the underlying rock. Almost all of them are adjacent to the outside and none of the rooms connect to a cellar or underground section. The chambers and passageways are cool, echoing and peaceful. However, there does not seem to be a single living soul here.

If the Player Characters are inspired to dig into the ground to see what lies beneath or to smash open the blocks of masonry, they discover that the blocks are hollow. Within each one are reams upon reams of paper, wadded together and yellow with age. The paper is covered with indecipherable writing. It is as if someone has embedded the contents of an alien library within the stones.

Characters who travel further than the initial island discover the dwindling end stages of rifts, exactly like those that appeared on Ashfar. Evidently the planequake has struck here, too. The rifts are now too small for anything to pass through them.

Event: Locating the Philosophers

The Player Characters may try to find the Philosophers with Divination magic or by searching the hard way. The Games Master should let them run through any methods they can think of. None of them produce any evidence of life. Attempts to *detect magic* are similarly fruitless. The Games Master should allow the Player Characters to continue searching until they are on the verge of giving up, at which point they should detect a curious phenomenon:

At the top of a zig-zag flight of stairs, a sphere of stone blocks hangs in the air without anything to support it. The sphere is dark grey, unlike anything else in evidence on the plane. It slowly rotates on its vertical axis. Scattered on the ground beneath it are the charred, skeletal remains of inhuman creatures.

It is no coincidence that the sphere appears when the Player Characters are at their wits' end, since part of its function is to test their patience. The sphere does not respond to physical assaults, and attempts to affect it with magic are largely futile, as it is technically an artefact. Addressing it verbally (such as with a greeting) causes it to stop rotating and reply telepathically to the creature who spoke to it. It then proceeds to the interrogation (see below).

The remains are those of three vrocks. A Knowledge (the planes), Knowledge (religion) or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 25) identifies them as such. They appear to have been blasted into fragments by a sudden pulse of energy.

Non-Player Character: The Interrogation

Sphere

The sphere was originally a form of magical artificial intelligence, intended to provide a counterpoint to a philosopher's monologues. It has been modified to act as a guardian. The philosophers have instructed it to ensure that only those who can prove themselves capable of *thinking* will be able to find their new retreat.

The sphere challenges those around it in the following manner. It poses a question; once the question is asked, it begins to glow a faint cherry-red. Depending on how the question is answered, the glow either brightens or fades. It then poses a further question, growing brighter or duller depending on the answer. If it reaches full brilliance, it emits a pulse of energy that deals 500 points of damage to all living creatures within 200 feet, with a Reflex saving throw (DC 30) allowed for half damage. If it asks five consecutive questions and is still dull, it opens, revealing an inscribed stone tablet (see below).

Event: Interrogation

The sphere speaks telepathically to one creature at a time, ignoring all others around it. It always begins with the question 'Who are you?' The creature must then deliver a satisfactory response. To be satisfactory, the response must be honest, philosophically apt, meaningful and respectful. 'I am Selina Elvenstar' or 'I am a wanderer of the worlds' would be acceptable; 'I am me', 'I'm the King of Shallenoi' or 'Never mind that, who are *you*?' would be unacceptable.

The sphere then attempts to find a counterpoint to the Player Character's statement and apply it. For example, 'I am a wanderer of the worlds' would be countered by 'There is no wandering, for all motion is deliberate.' If it cannot find a counterpoint, it attempts a new question on a similar level, such as 'Why do you exist?' or 'Can you be certain?'

The sphere assigns a point for each acceptable answer and deducts one for each unacceptable answer. If the total heads into the negative, the sphere begins to glow. At –10 points, it detonates as described above. If the total reaches +10, it asks its final question:

'*Tell me why I should not destroy you.*'

With this, it begins to count slowly from 20 backwards to one. This is an attempt to find out whether the creature can remain philosophical in a life-or-death situation. So long as the creature attempts to make an answer (even deliberate silence is acceptable), the sphere unfolds. If the creature resorts to violence or attempts to flee, the sphere detonates immediately.

The Stone Tablet

Once a character has successfully philosophised with the sphere to its satisfaction, the following occurs:

The stone blocks making up the sphere silently pull away from one another, moving outwards and still keeping their spherical pattern. Revealed in the centre is an inscribed stone tablet. The words seem unfamiliar at first, as if they were in some odd language of swirls and dashes, but as you watch they twist themselves around and spell out a message in the Common tongue.

'*The Philosophers of Arithmea greet the worthy traveller who has passed the Ordeal of the Sphere. We regret that our home has temporarily become unstable and we have been obliged to relocate our operations to a new base. If you, like us, have suffered from the recent trembling of worlds, then we invite you to join us in peace and contemplation. If sentient life is to survive, then the best of us must conjoin our intellects and work as one. You may seek us, traveller, in the Skull of Paithah the Creator.*'

Upon the reverse side of the tablet, a diagram has been inscribed showing where the Skull of Paithah lies in relation to the other planes. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 20) is required to make sense of it, after which a character can find his way to the Skull by the usual means.

Researching the Skull of Paithah

A Knowledge (religion) check (DC 30) recalls that Paithah is the primary god of the Archalean pantheon, the deities of a now-defunct religion of Ashfar. Paithah was supposed to have been the deity who blew the bubbles in the cosmic waters that formed themselves into worlds. It is conceivable that Paithah is dead, though gods are not generally known for their mortality.

If It All Goes Wrong

The Player Characters may completely misunderstand the sphere's purpose or refuse to travel to Arithmea in the first place. They may find it more interesting to jump through steady rifts and visit Hell, or lurk on the Astral Plane until this all blows over. At epic levels, the actions of Player Characters are impossible to predict.

The Games Master can point them towards the Skull of Paithah in other ways. Each faction in the next chapter has, after all, found its own way to the Skull, simply because it is the most stable neighbouring plane to their own. Library research can therefore indicate that the plane where the Skull lies is a point of exceptional stability. A travelling mercane can let the Player Characters know that there seems to be a gathering of Important Persons inside the skull of a dead god. If all else fails, the Conclave can take the initiative, suggesting to the Player Characters that they mount an expedition to the Skull and find out if it is truly the safe haven it is believed to be.

The Crumbling Skull of Space

Summary: The occupants of other dimensions begin to assemble in the dead god's cranium, gathered into factions that represent the interests of the peoples of their home plane or the interests of their rulers, depending on the faction. These factions range from the radiant retinue of Lady Myonatix to the ponderous and solemn Philosophers of Arithmea, the eccentric and diabolic Bodiless Ao, the elven Sylvan Covenant and the wholly enigmatic Legion of the Realm Imponderable.

All tell similar stories. Their home planes have come under attack from outer dimensions, as if something has upset the order of the worlds, bringing Hell and Heaven into direct conjunction with the Material Plane. The only conclusion is that something is interfering with the Astral Plane itself.

The floating Skull is clearly the best place to establish a base of operations. Reality here is stable and planar travel to and from the Skull seems to be reliable, with no chance of dumping a traveller into a random dimension. From this vantage point, the Assembly of heroes from different planes can study what is happening in safety, travel to planes that need assistance and – gods willing – prevent the multiverse from collapsing into non-existence.

While the Assembly is the main focus of the chapter, the Skull itself must be investigated. Strange horrors are festering in its empty sinuses, and must be cleared out before any building can take place. The home base will not last long if some hungry space eel emerges from the Skull's eye socket and comes looking for prey!

In this chapter, the Player Characters meet the heroes of other worlds and (if they wish) take part in the foundation of an interplanar alliance. Creatures of good and evil, law and chaos, temporarily set aside their differences, as this threat may spell the destruction of all of them. As alliances go, it is a deeply uneasy one.

The Skull of Paithah

The following account of how Paithah's skull came to be drifting here can be retrieved with a Knowledge (religion) or Bardic Lore check (DC 30):

Paithah was once a deity, the bearer of the Opal, the chief of his own small pantheon. His people, who worshipped him, were neither populous nor especially strong, but they were his own. They believed that he had created all things. This belief sustained Paithah and gave him the power to continue creation. He busied himself with the building of worlds, shapes in space that reflected his power.

Absorbed in his own craft, Paithah neglected his worshippers. He did not grant spells reliably, nor did he answer prayers. His people stayed faithful to his worship, even though they knew in their hearts that he had abandoned them. Bereft of divine protection, the people of Paithah fell victim to the many hazards of life. There was no one to heal or guide, for the priests prayed to empty altars. The other deities of Paithah's pantheon quietly left him alone in the void and went to join other pantheons, where they were accepted as lesser deities, changed their names and began to be worshipped again.

When the people of Paithah steadily died from famine, plague and war, he began to notice his power ebbing away. He thought himself merely tired from the labour of creation and lay down to rest. For years he slumbered.

He awoke with a sense of dread. Too late, like a child remembering that it has a pet that it was supposed to feed, he remembered his people. No prayers reached him. No worship flowed through his being. By the light of the Opal that still burned upon his brow, he saw that even the worlds that he had created now rolled lifeless around him, starved to a premature death, denied the attention of their maker.

Paithah uttered a great cry of mourning for his dead people and his dead worlds. Then, in his misery, he began to devour himself. He bit off his hands and gnawed off his feet, ground his own vertebrae between his teeth and pulled the god-meat from his own ribs. At last, all that was left was a head, blind and mad, drifting in space.

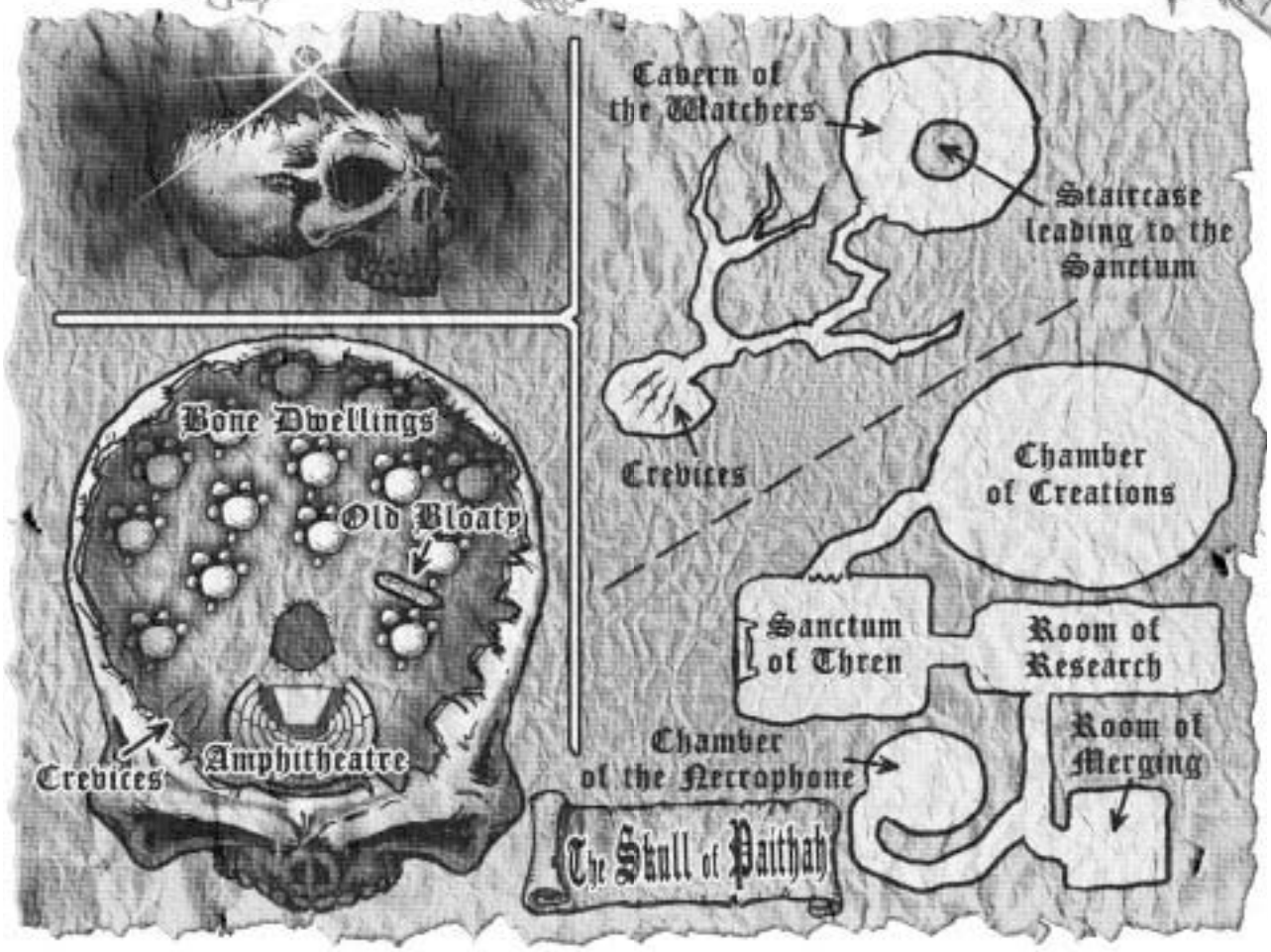
When next a traveller of the planes came to Paithah's realm, there was only a vast jawless skull, the cranium hollow and crumbling. Above, where the brow had been, the Opal still flamed, casting its light into the cavities that once had held Paithah's brain. The lifeless spheres still orbited at a far distance, tombstones for a dead god.

Planar Conditions

The plane where the Skull drifts has the following traits:

- No gravity. Creatures merely float in space unless propelled by some means. Within 300 feet of the Skull, objective directional gravity begins. The Skull is the focus of gravity on the plane.

- Strong planar stability. The Skull of Paithah still exerts an influence on the plane, though the god is long dead. This plane is immune to the effects of any planequakes that affect neighbouring planes.



Arrival at the Skull

When the Player Characters first travel to the plane, they arrive in a realm of open space, pure black with no stars. The only salient feature is a bright point of light several miles away. This proves to be the Opal, a brilliant jewel that could accommodate the Palace of Black Glass from Caldraza with room to spare, shedding light as bright as the sun, though prismatic and inconstant. The jewel is not in fact made from solid opal, but resembles one in its shifting rainbow light.

Beneath the Opal lies the open Skull. It is the size of a city, several miles across. The Player Characters can see figures moving around inside it, and also within odd bubbles of bone with apertures in them that do not seem to be parts of the original anatomy. Unless they approach stealthily, Hygrave and his Huntsmen ride forth on their bane-steeds and issue a challenge:

'Hold, strangers! Know you this! We are the mailed fist that keeps the peace! The place to which you have come is a common sanctuary for all. Though we hail from different worlds and some are sworn enemies, we have agreed that we shall shed no blood within the Skull of Paithah. If you bring words of peaceful counsel, then you are welcome. If you come to make war, then Hygrave shall give you war.'

A Sense Motive check (DC 15) reveals that Hygrave has clearly appointed himself and his retinue as the guardians of whatever group is assembling here. He seems to be the kind of man who likes to have orders to follow. Assuming the Player Characters do not make trouble, they can come closer and view the assembled company.

As you descend into the immense emptiness of the dead god's skull, you see that it has been deformed in places, as if it has been melted and reshaped. Some force has moulded the bone into primitive structures such as huts and towers, with windows in them. In the centre of the structures, near the great pit of the spinal column where the vertebrae would have joined the Skull, is an amphitheatre. A figure in peacock robes, tiny from this distance, paces around inside it.

Bodiless Ao (see below) is responsible for moulding the bone into dwellings. The amphitheatre is the assembly point for the representatives from the various planes. Lord Fnut is the pacing figure; he is collecting his thoughts before the meeting begins.

If Hygrave is with the Player Characters, he informs them that the meeting will start in an hour and assigns them to a bone cluster to use as a home away from home. If the Player Characters suggest that they would rather not take rooms inside the Skull, Hygrave explains the need to stay here:

'*Travelling between the planes is dangerous right now. Lots of people have been killed trying to make simple journeys. We don't know what's out there. Better that we all stay here, where we can watch one another. Besides, some of the people here don't have homes to go back to.*'

With that, he strides off to consult with Lord Fnut. The Player Characters can still choose not to use the accommodations offered, but doing so earns them the contempt and anger of the assembled factions.

The Bone Structures: The bone has been mutated using Bodiless Ao's *bone shape* spell. Dwellings resemble clusters of bubbles, while towers seem to have been dragged up like molten plastic. Each dwelling contains three to six simple rooms, roughly circular in shape, around twenty feet across.

The Player Characters may be suspicious of a temporary residence made entirely from bone, but *detect magic* only reveals that there is no residual magic lingering, while *detect evil* reveals overwhelming evil auras in the residences of the appropriate factions (Jasmeera's Court and the Demons of Hecke) and in Ao's tower. Using *detect* spells near other peoples' residences is not good manners, however, and the Player Characters earn reprimands if they are caught at it.

The Factions

The factions are the most important part of the coming adventures. They give the Player Characters a chance to interact with powerful Non-Player Characters from other planes, working together for common survival. The adventure hooks for the remainder of the book come from the interactions of the factions.

When the Player Characters arrive on the scene, the interplanar alliance is about to be formalised. They are late additions. All of the other factions already know each other, either through formal introduction or by prior acquaintance. The Player Characters are thus a new, unknown factor and pique the curiosity of those already gathered here.

The Assembly called by Lord Fnut is a good way to introduce the factions one by one as they leave their temporary dwellings and make their ways down to the amphitheatre. The italicised text in each faction section provides a first-sight description.

Faction Members and Leaders: The faction descriptions include statistics for a typical member and a description of the person in charge. Naturally, not all members are identical but the statistics given are typical enough for the Games Master to make minor adjustments on the fly. The faction leader's statistics are identical to those of the members unless otherwise stated.

Faction Attitudes: All factions (except the Conclave of Ashfar, if it is present) begin with a default attitude of Indifferent towards the Player Characters, unless there has already been interaction in earlier adventures that would change this. Even chaotic evil outsiders such as the Aerial Demons are Indifferent rather than Hostile, because of the circumstances.

Diplomacy checks (and appropriate roleplaying) can temporarily change these attitudes, but in order to change them in a lasting fashion, the Player Characters must take action that significantly benefits the faction, such as giving gifts, providing help or thwarting enemies.

Faction Interactions: If a faction is Friendly or Helpful, it will provide assistance to the Player Characters in the form of spellcasting, skill use, lending items and even assigning members to help the Player Characters in their adventuring, though it is unlikely to provide more than one member for this purpose. Bodiless Ao will not accompany a group anywhere, no matter how good his relations with them.

If a faction is Unfriendly or Hostile, it will denounce the Player Characters verbally when possible and seek to sabotage their work behind the scenes. Even though the Assembly is supposed to be about banding together for mutual survival, it rapidly becomes apparent that the situation is more like a group of shipwreck survivors on a life raft – the fewer people are left, the more likely it is the others will survive.

The Balance: As some of the factions hate the others, the Player Characters cannot easily have everyone on their side at the same time. The following table shows how gaining the favour of one faction can result in the loss of another faction's regard. Every time the Player Characters' relations with one opposed faction improve, degrade their relations with the other by an equivalent amount.

Opposed Factions

Hygrave's Huntsmen	Bodiless Ao
The Sylvan Covenant	Jasmeera's Court
The Retinue of Lady Myonatix	The Aerial Demons of Hecke
The Planespiders	The Threnody in Velvet

Note for the Games Master: The factions and their leaders are extensively detailed, with statistics given where necessary, because they are meant to interact with the Player Characters on many occasions. They are not supposed to be a set of super-powered Non-Player Characters who just sit in the background being powerful. They should be allied with, argued with, plotted against and even killed when necessary.

With the exception of Bodiless Ao, who is planning to take over as the mind in control of the Dark, the storyline does not depend upon any one Non-Player Character remaining alive. The Games Master should feel free to slaughter any one of them when the mood of the moment demands it, or when the players need to know that the stakes are high.

Similarly, the magical items the faction leaders and members own can be traded to the Player Characters, given as gifts if the Player Characters prove worthy allies and friends, or even left to a Player Character after the death of the original bearer. At least one magical item (*Fleeting Shadow*) is desperate for a new bearer and is prepared to have the current one killed if necessary.

The Aerial Demons of Hecke

The creatures before you resemble something out of the nightmares of a peasant who has spent all day at the fair drinking rough cider. They are clearly demons, for you recognise the species. One is a succubus making no effort to disguise herself, while the others are a marilith, a hezrou and a glabrezu. The marilith juggles knives and whistles to herself. All the demons wear carnival motley.

Their leader is not something you have seen before. He resembles a grotesque clown, with a stark white face and jagged teeth like a man-trap. When he walks, his limbs wobble as if filled with gas.

This bizarre group is a band of renegade demons from a layer of Hell called the Ragged Carnival. They owe allegiance to nobody and travel the various layers of their abyssal home, putting on shows and entertaining the lords of the Pit. Their vehicle is an airship made from the skins of flayed souls which, being immortal, are not dead and still writhe in pain from the stitches (see the sidebar on Old Bloaty).

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Agenda: The demons want the crisis to be dealt with but they do not intend to do anything to help, not unless they are forced to. They are too busy celebrating, mocking the other factions and getting into trouble. They see themselves as camp followers rather than contributors. If they are challenged on this, they bluster and make sneeringly sincere promises to help more in future, then carry on exactly as before.

Members: The aerial demons number five in total: Karla the succubus, Wrenchwart the glabrezu, Zimmergin the hezrou, Mavreen the marilith and Mister Hecke, the clown demon leader of the troupe.

Karla the succubus: CR 9; Medium outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil); HD 12d8+24; hp 78; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average); AC 21, touch 12, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +12; Grp +13; Atk +13 melee (1d6+1, claw); Full Atk +13 melee (1d6+1, 2 claws); SA energy drain, spell-like abilities, *summon demon;* SQ damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 20, telepathy 100 ft., tongues; AL CE; SV: Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +10; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 26.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +26, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +20, Disguise +23* (+25 acting), Escape Artist +10, Hide +10, Intimidate +25, Knowledge (the planes) +12, Listen +25, Move Silently +10, Search +12, Spot +25, Survival +10 (+12 following tracks), Use Rope +11 (+13 with bindings); Ability Focus (energy drain), Dodge, Mobility, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Bluff).

Energy Drain (Su): Karla's kiss bestows one negative level, which requires a Fortitude saving throw (DC 26) to remove. If the target is not willing to be kissed, she must start a grapple, which provokes an attack of opportunity. The kiss also has the effect of a *suggestion* spell, asking the victim to accept another kiss. The victim must succeed on a Will saving throw (DC 24) to negate the effect of the *suggestion*. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will: *charm monster* (DC 22), *detect good*, *detect thoughts* (DC 20), *ethereal jaunt* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *polymorph* (humanoid form only, no limit on duration), *suggestion* (DC 21), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only). Caster level is 12th and the saving throw DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day, Karla can attempt to summon 1 vrock with a 30% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3rd level spell.

Tongues (Su): Karla has a permanent *tongues* ability (as the spell, caster level 12th).

Skills: Karla has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. *While using her *alter self* ability, Karla gains a +10 circumstance bonus on Disguise checks.

Mavreen the marilith: CR 17; Large outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil); HD 16d8+144; hp 216; Init +4; Spd 40 ft.; AC 29, touch 13, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +16; Grp +29; Atk +33 melee (2d6+17 plus 1 Constitution/19-20, *+8 longsword of wounding*) or +24 melee (1d8+9, slam) or +24 melee (4d6+9, tail slap); Full Atk +33 melee (2d6+17 plus 1 Constitution/19-20, *+8 longsword of wounding*) and +28 melee (2d6+7/19–20, 5 *+3 longswords*) and +22 melee (4d6+4, tail slap); or +24 melee (1d8+9, 6 slams) and +22 melee (4d6+4, tail slap); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA constrict 4d6+13, improved grab, spell-like abilities, *summon demon;* SQ damage reduction 10/good and cold iron, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 25, telepathy 100 ft.; AL CE; SV: Fort +19, Ref +14, Will +14; Str 29, Dex 19, Con 29, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 24.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +26, Concentration +28, Diplomacy +30, Disguise +7 (+9 acting), Hide +19, Intimidate +28, Listen +31, Move Silently +23, Search 23, Sense Motive +23, Spellcraft +23 (+25 scrolls), Spot +31, Survival +4 (+6 following tracks), Use Magic Device +26 (+28 scrolls); Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Multiattack, Multiweapon Fighting, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Constrict (Ex): Mavreen deals 4d6+13 points of damage with a successful grapple check. The constricted creature must succeed on a Fortitude saving throw (DC 27) or lose consciousness for as long as it remains in the coils and for 2d4 rounds thereafter. The save DC is Strength-based.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Mavreen must hit with her tail slap attack. She can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If she succeeds on the grapple check, she can constrict.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will: *align weapon, blade barrier* (DC 23), *magic weapon, project image* (DC 23), *polymorph, see invisibility, telekinesis* (DC 22), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *unholy aura* (DC 25). Caster level is 16th and the saving throw DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day, Mavreen can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches, 1d4 hezrou, or one nalfeshnee with a 50% chance of success, or one glabrezu or another marilith with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 5th level spell.

True Seeing (Su): Mavreen has continuous *true seeing* as the spell, caster level 16th.

Skills: Mavreen has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Equipment & Treasure: +8 longsword of wounding (epic), *+3 longswords* (5)

Wrenchwart the glabrezu: CR 13; Huge outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil); HD 12d8+120; hp 174; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 27, touch 8, flat-footed 27; Base Atk +12; Grp +30; Atk +20 melee (2d8+10, pincers); Full Atk +20 melee (2d8+10, 2 pincers) and +18 melee (1d6+5, 2 claws) and +18 melee (1d8+5, bite); Space/Reach 15 ft./15 ft.; SA improved grab, spell-like abilities, *summon demon;* SQ damage reduction 10/good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10, spell resistance 21, telepathy 100 ft., true seeing; AL CE; SV: Fort +18, Ref +8, Will +11; Str 31, Dex 10, Con 31, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 20.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +22, Concentration +25, Diplomacy +9, Disguise +5 (+7 acting), Intimidate +24, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +26, Move Silently +18, Search +18, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +18, Spot +26, Survival +3 (+5 following tracks); Cleave, Great Cleave, Multiattack, Persuasive, Power Attack.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Wrenchwart must hit a Medium or smaller opponent with a pincer attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will: *chaos hammer* (DC 19), *confusion* (DC 19), *dispel magic, mirror image, reverse gravity* (DC 22), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *unholy blight* (DC 19); 1/day: *power word stun*. Caster level is 14th and the saving throw DCs are Charisma-based. Once per month, Wrenchwart can fulfil a *wish* for a mortal humanoid. Wrenchwart can use this ability to offer a mortal whatever he desires, but unless the *wish* is used to create pain and suffering in the world, Wrenchwart demands either terrible evil acts or great sacrifice as compensation.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day Wrenchwart can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches or 1d2 vrocks with a 50% chance of success, or another glabrezu with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th level spell.

True Seeing (Su): Wrenchwart continuously uses true seeing as the spell (caster level 14th).

Skills: Wrenchwart has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Zimmergin the hezrou: CR 22; Huge outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil); HD 30d8+360; hp 495; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 24, touch 7, flat-footed 24; Base Atk +30; Grp +47; Atk +37 melee (3d8+9, bite); Full Atk +37 melee (3d8+9, bite)

and +35 melee (2d6+4, 2 claws); Space/Reach 15 ft./15 ft.; SA spell-like abilities, stench, improved grab, *summon demon;* SQ damage reduction 10/good, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical damage and poison, resistance to acid 20, cold 20 and fire 20, spell resistance 30, telepathy 100 ft.; AL CE; SV: Fort +29, Ref +16, Will +19; Str 29, Dex 8, Con 34, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 22.

Skills & Feats: Climb +22, Concentration +45, Hide +24, Escape Artist +32, Intimidate +38, Listen +43, Move Silently +32, Search +35, Spellcraft +35, Spot +43, Survival +2 (+4 following tracks), Use Rope +19 (+21 with bindings); Alertness, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Dire Charge, Energy Resistance (acid), Energy Resistance (cold), Energy Resistance (fire), Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Toughness.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Zimmergin must hit with both claw attacks. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will: *chaos hammer* (DC 20), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *unholy blight* (DC 20); 3/day: *blasphemy* (DC 23), *gaseous form*. Caster level is 13th and the saving throw DCs are Charisma-based.

Stench (Ex): When Zimmergin fights, any living creature (except other demons) within 10 feet must succeed on a Fortitude saving throw (DC 37) or be nauseated for as long as it remains within the affected area and for 1d4 rounds afterward. Creatures that successfully save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same hezrou's stench for 24 hours. A *delay poison* or *neutralize poison* spell removes either condition from one creature. Creatures that have immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Summon Demon (Sp): Once per day Zimmergin can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches or another hezrou with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th level spell.

Skills: Zimmergin has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

Mister Hecke

The troupe's leader loves nothing more than the tender flesh of children and makes no secret of his horrible appetites. He is a demon through and through and revels in demonstrating this. Although he has agreed to help the alliance, he cannot stop himself from intimidating people and making side references to how he wants to 'gobble them all up.'

Mister Hecke, Male Demon Clown: CR 18; Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, chaotic); HD 18d8+54; hp 135; Init +10; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19, touch 16, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +18; Grp +28; Atk +22 melee (1d4+4, slap); Full Atk +22 melee (1d4+4, 2 slaps) and +17 melee (1d6+2, bite); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. and see below; SA constrict, flower squirt, frightful presence, improved grab, pie throw, shocking grip, size alteration, trip; SQ damage reduction 15/cold iron and good, elastic body, immune to disease, fire, mind-affecting effects and poison, indestructible, regeneration 5, resistance to cold 10, electrical damage 10 and sonic 10, spell resistance 32; AL CE; SV Fort +16, Ref +19, Will +16; Str 18, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 28.

Skills & Feats: Climb +25, Hide +17, Intimidate +30, Listen +13, Move Silently +27, Perform (comedy) +30, Perform (dance) +30, Perform (juggle) +30, Spot +24; Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack.

Constrict (Ex): Mister Hecke can wrap his elastic, sinuous arms around a victim and choke the life out of him. He can twine an arm around a victim's neck several times like a python. With a successful grapple check, Mister Hecke deals 2d4+8 points of damage.

Elastic Body (Ex): Mister Hecke's body is made from stretchy, rubbery material. He can attack with a slap or with a bite as a reach weapon with a range of ten more feet than is usual for his size, by extending his arm or neck. He can also squeeze through gaps of up to six inches across, taking a move action to do so. This flexibility gives Mister Hecke a +6 racial bonus on all Escape Artist checks and grapple checks.

Flower Squirt (Su): Demon clowns grow large, flower-like organs on their chests. These are glands that secrete a powerful acid. As a standard action, Mister Hecke can squirt this acid at a creature within 30 feet. The acid squirt requires a ranged touch attack to hit and deals 3d6 points of acid damage. In addition, the target creature must make a Fortitude save (DC 22) or be dealt 1d6 points of Charisma damage as well. The save is Constitution-based; the Charisma damage is a contact poison effect.

Frightful Presence (Ex): When Mister Hecke laughs, all creatures within 30 feet who have less than 18 Hit Dice or levels must make a Will save (DC 28) or become frightened for 5d6 rounds. An opponent who succeeds at this save is immune to Mister Hecke's frightful presence for the next 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Immune to Mind-Affecting Spells and Effects: Mister Hecke is not mindless, but his mind is incomprehensible to other creatures. It is not possible to use mind-affecting spells or effects against him.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Mister Hecke must hit with his slap attack. He can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Indestructible (Su): It is practically impossible to permanently destroy a demon clown. Even it is killed, it spontaneously reforms after 1d4 days at a spot within 100 feet of the eggshell where its makeup design kit is kept. The only way to permanently finish Mister Hecke is to find his eggshell and destroy it.

Pie Throw (Su): As a standard action, Mister Hecke can manifest a pulpy mass of creamy goo in one hand and throw it. This is a ranged attack with a range increment of TEN feet and maximum range of 100 feet. Once he has used this ability, he may not use it again for 1d4 rounds. A creature struck by the mass must make a Fortitude save (DC 28) or have the goo plastered to his face. He is immediately blinded and unable to speak. He also begins to suffocate, as the sludge clings to his mouth and nose; the Games Master should refer to the drowning rules in the *DMG*. Ripping off the clinging mass requires a successful Strength check (DC 28). Once removed, it becomes inert. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Regeneration (Ex): Mister Hecke takes normal damage from good-aligned cold iron weapons and from spells and effects with the good descriptor.

Shocking Grip (Su): Three times per day, Mister Hecke can make a touch attack against a target and deliver a violent jolt of electricity. He gains a +3 bonus to the attack roll if the target wears metal armour, is made from metal or carries large amounts of metal. The shocking grip deals 18d6 points of electrical damage. The recipient must also make a Fortitude save (DC 28) or be paralysed for one round, which allows the demon to make a second shocking grip attack the next round against the same target. A successful use of this attack against the same opponent as in the previous round does not count as a separate use of the ability for the day. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Size Alteration (Su): Mister Hecke may increase or decrease his size at will like a humanoid balloon. He may take a full-round action to increase or decrease his size, adjusting his Armour Class, attack modifiers and other related statistics accordingly. He may not become smaller than Tiny or larger than Huge. He may only remain at an altered size for one hour per day, after which he reverts to his natural size and cannot use the ability again for 1d4 hours.

Spell-like Abilities (Sp): At will – *blink, confusion* (DC 22), *hideous laughter* (DC 20); 3/day – *irresistible dance* (DC 27); 1/day – *maze* (DC 27). Caster level is 16th.

Trip (Ex): The long, floppy shoes that Mister Hecke wears are ideal for tripping moving opponents. He receives a +4 circumstance bonus to any trip attempt made as an attack of opportunity.

Old Bloaty

The Aerial Demons of Hecke travel in their interplanar airship, Old Bloaty, which is currently moored beside their cluster of bone dwellings. Old Bloaty is a 200-foot-long sausage-shaped dirigible, beneath which hangs a 40-foot-square cab for passengers to ride in. The skin of the craft is made from the stretched skin of flayed souls, which squeal in ceaseless agony.

A mass of gurgling organs within the dirigible emits the gas that keeps the ship aloft. Jets of this same gas, set alight by spontaneous combustion, propel the ship along. It flies at a maximum speed of 60 ft. and has extremely poor manoeuvrability, being able to turn only five degrees per 100 feet moved. It does, however, have the power to travel between the planes. Three times per day, the airship can execute a *plane shift* as if by the spell (caster level 20th).

The vessel does not have a single pilot. Old Bloaty is sentient and contains the brain and other organs of a former member of the group. Demons can communicate with it with their *telepathy* ability, giving it flight instructions.

Attitudes to Other Factions

Bodiless Ao: 'Some people you just don't want to mess with. We won't be messing with him. We know our limits.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'The great thing about this lot is that they are so serious. They treat everything like it's a clue for what to do next. You can wind them up for hours and they never catch on.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'Who *does* she think she is? She and her crew might be the cocks of the walk on whatever poxy little backwater plane they come from, but there are ladies back home in Hell who could eat her for breakfast. She's got style all right, but she's not as big a fish as she thinks. No reason why we should teach her that lesson. We'll just sit back and watch her learn it from someone else.'

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'Stuck-up bunch of ponces. They could do with being taken down a peg or two. Get one of them on his own with us, and he'd mess himself.'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'Nice schtick. That should keep them guessing for a while.'

The Philosophers of Arithmea: 'Boring! Boring! Come on, Grandad, show us yer arse!'

The Planespiders: 'They can't stop us from having a good time. Just let them try.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'They've got to go. End of the world is one thing but psychedelic pixies is something else.

First chance we get when nobody's looking, we'll have a crack at them. Nobody here's going to miss them.'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'They're spoiling for a fight. You can see it in their eyes. Well, we won't be doing anything to provoke them. They can take their righteous indignation out on someone else.'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'With the proper encouragement, this lot could turn into right little nightmares. All it takes is a bit of friendly getting-to-know-you chat to get things moving, and they don't seem to have very many friends right now, do they?'

Bodiless Ao and the Ivory Child

Slowly walking towards you with an expression of great solemnity is a blonde-haired child of around ten. She wears a pale yellow surplice, as if she belongs in a church choir somewhere.

The child carries a pillow of black velvet on which rests a human skull, brown with age. The skull's eye sockets are set with rich red rubies, and it has diamonds set in place of its teeth. You know in the pit of your stomach that this is something to be dreaded. Tiny though it may be, there is more concentrated power in that bejewelled skull than in any foe you have ever faced.

Bodiless Ao is a demilich, an undead creature of surpassing power and intelligence. Such is his might and influence that he counts as a faction in his own right. All of the other factions look to him with a mixture of dread and curiosity. For such a creature to be here at all, lending his *help* instead of trying to eat souls, is very disturbing. He does not fly around on his own, although he can. He prefers to be carried about on a cushion.

The human girl who carries him is known only as the Ivory Child. Ao speaks through her. He gives her telepathic messages which she relays in a sweet voice. She seems to be a complete innocent. Ao raised her from babyhood, and she loves him dearly and sees him as a benevolent uncle. He, for his part, has never done anything to harm her – yet. Outside observers generally consider this relationship utterly warped and wrong, though they keep such opinions private, since those who have tried to 'rescue' the Ivory Child have never been seen again.

Agenda: Bodiless Ao knows more than all the other factions, though he does not yet know everything. He has correctly deduced that the Dark is behind this shattering of realms and that the drow of Ashfar are its agents in this. He is therefore helping the alliance to investigate, pursue and ultimately confront the plane-destroyers and their master.

However, his intent is not to save the multiverse from extinction but to take over as the *new* dark demiurge. He correctly suspects that the Dark is not a being but an *office* which is taken by a new incumbent if the old one perishes. He now aims to destroy the current incarnation of the Dark and take its place. He has already achieved nigh- unsurpassable power as a demilich; the only remaining step is to become a deity.

Bodiless Ao, Male Demilich: CR 29; Diminutive undead; HD 21d12; hp 130; Init +7; Spd fly 180 ft. (perfect); AC 48, touch 35, flat-footed 48; Base Atk +10; Grp -2; Atk +35 melee (10d6+20 plus paralysing touch, touch); Full Atk +35 melee (10d6+20 plus paralysing touch, touch); Space/Reach 1 ft./0 ft.; SA fear aura, paralysing touch, perfect automatic still spell, spell-like abilities, spells, trap the soul; SQ +20 turn resistance, damage reduction 15/epic and bludgeoning, immune to cold, electrical damage, mind-affecting attacks and polymorph, magic immunity, phylactery transference, resistance to acid 20, fire 20 and sonic 20, undead traits; AL NE; SV Fort +10, Ref +12, Will +17; Str 10, Dex 14, Con —, Int 39 (with *headband*), Wis 24, Cha 20.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +25, Craft (alchemy) +34, Hide +35, Knowledge (arcana) +34, Knowledge (history) +26, Knowledge (religion) +34, Knowledge (the planes) +34, Listen +27, Move Silently +22, Search +44, Sense Motive +27, Spellcraft +36, Spot +37; Automatic Quicken Spell, Blinding Speed, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Enlarge Spell, Heighten Spell, Improved Initiative, Improved Spell Capacity (10th)Lightning Reflexes, Maximise Spell, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll, Spell Penetration, Tenacious Magic (*crushing hand*), Toughness.

Spells prepared (4/8/8/7/7/7/7/6/6/6/3, save DC 24 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, mage hand, message, read magic;* 1st – *alarm, mage armour, magic aura, obscuring mist, ray of enfeeblement* (2), *shield, silent image;* 2nd – *arcane lock, command undead* (2), *detect thoughts, locate object, misdirection, summon swarm, web;* 3rd – *arcane sight, dispel magic* (2), *displacement, ray of exhaustion, slow, suggestion;* 4th – *black tentacles, bone shape, dimensional anchor, greater invisibility, hallucinatory terrain, phantasmal killer, stoneskin;* 5th – *dismissal, dominate person, feeblemind, mage's faithful hound, mage's private sanctum, mind fog, wall of force;* 6th – *antimagic field, chain lightning, circle of death, create undead, greater dispel magic, legend lore, wall of iron;* 7th – *control undead, forcecage, greater scrying, greater teleport, plane shift, sequester;* 8th – *create greater undead, demand, discern location, greater prying eyes, telekinetic sphere, temporal stasis;* 9th – *chain lightning* (maximised), *crushing hand, gate, mage's disjunction, time stop, wish;* 10th – *delayed blast fireball* (maximised), *disintegrate* (maximised, enlarged), *dominate person* (heightened).

Fear Aura (Su): Bodiless Ao emanates a terrible aura of dread, the fear of final annihilation. Creatures of less than five HD in a 60-foot radius who look at him must succeed at a Will save (DC 19) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell as cast by a 21st level caster. Ao can suppress this ability if he chooses.

Immunities (Ex): Bodiless Ao is immune to cold, electrical, *polymorph* and mind-affecting attacks.

Magic Immunity (Ex): Bodiless Ao is immune to all magical and supernatural effects except as follows. A *shatter* spell affects him as if he were a crystalline creature, but deals half the damage normally indicated. A *dispel evil* spell deals 3d6 points of damage, with a Fortitude save allowed for half damage. *Holy smite* spells affect him normally.

Paralysing Touch (Su): Any living creature Bodiless Ao touches must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 36) or be permanently paralysed. *Remove paralysis* or any spell that can remove a curse can free the victim. The effect cannot be dispelled. Anyone paralysed by the touch seems dead, though a successful Spot check (DC 20) or Heal check (DC 15) reveals that the victim is still alive.

Perfect Automatic Still Spell (Ex): Bodiless Ao can cast all the spells he knows without gestures.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *alter self, astral projection, create greater undead, create undead, death knell, enervation, greater dispel magic, harm, summon monster I–IX, telekinesis, weird;* 2/day – *greater planar ally.* The caster level is 21st.

Trap the Soul (Su): Bodiless Ao can trap the souls of up to eight living creatures per day. To use this power, he selects any target he can see within 300 feet. The target is allowed a Fortitude save (DC 36). If the target makes its save, it gains four negative levels; this does not count as a use of the ability. If the target fails its save, its soul is instantly drawn from its body and trapped within one of Bodiless Ao's eye or tooth gems. The gem gleams for 24 hours, indicating the captive soul within. The soulless body collapses in a mass of corruption and rots to dust in a single round. Bodiless Ao slowly devours the soul over 24 hours, at the end of which time the soul is completely absorbed and the victim is gone forever. If Bodiless Ao is overcome before the soul is eaten, crushing the gem releases the soul, at which point it is free to seek the afterlife or, if Starborn or Host, be restored to life. *Death ward* does not grant immunity to trap the soul but instead bestows a +5 bonus on the Fortitude save and negates level loss if the save is successful.

Equipment & Treasure: Bracers of armour +8, headband of intellect +6, robe of eyes. These items are all located in Ao's cushion. The *robe* grants him 120-foot darkvision, the ability to see all forms of invisible and ethereal things within 120 feet and the power to retain his Dexterity bonus to Armour Class even when flat-footed. He also cannot be flanked.

Bodiless Ao's Phylactery: In a move of truly epic horror, Bodiless Ao has concealed his phylactery within the body of the Ivory Child. This is one reason for their inseparability.

When he first 'adopted' her, he realised that she would be the best possible hiding place for his phylactery, since no non-evil hero would be willing to kill an innocent child to destroy him. He used potent magic (and many years of patient work) to create a cavity beside her heart, into which he placed his phylactery. It is not possible to remove it by normal means without killing the child.

A phenomenal Heal check (DC 70) can surgically remove the phylactery while leaving the child alive, though she will have zero hit points afterwards. If she is somehow given the power to regenerate, this also makes removal of the phylactery possible.

Magical items kept in close association with the phylactery transfer their effects to Bodiless Ao. He keeps his magical items in his velvet cushion, so when the Ivory Child holds it, the items are close enough to the phylactery for the effect to be transferred. If the items move more than ten feet away

from the Ivory Child, their effects are lost. She thus holds the cushion if Ao needs to fly. Most observers believe that the phylactery is in the cushion, rather than in the child.

Rumours about This Faction: Some believe that the Ivory Child is the true evil, a demoness of some sort who has taken the form of a young girl and cloaked her alignment from detection. Bodiless Ao is not a demilich at all, but merely a mock-up made from an old skull, some gems and a lot of magic. Why else does he never speak except through her?

Attitudes towards Other Factions

Note that these are Bodiless Ao's private thoughts, given here for the Games Master's use. If he is asked to give an opinion, he is much less explicit. See the sidebar on Playing Bodiless Ao for guidelines.

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: *Perfect scapegoats. Such crude evil is exactly what I need. If I ever need to remove any of the pieces from the game, I can make these bumblers seem responsible.*

The Conclave of Ashfar: *All they want is to save the multiverse from extinction. Good. So long as they believe that I want the same as they, they will swallow their disgust and work with me. If they turn on me, well, they are not strong enough to do me significant harm and their souls would be succulent.*

The Court of Jasmeera: *They are rivals and they know it. I expect Jasmeera will approach me soon and offer some form of deal, which I will rebuff, thus gaining trust and respect from those who find out about it.*

Hygrave's Huntsmen: *They could not be any easier to manipulate if they had strings through their limbs! A huntsman follows a trail. All I need to do is lay it down for them. The vaguest hint that they can find the destroyer of their world, and they will set off like greyhounds.*

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: *I resent mysteries that I have not engineered! How dare they remain closed to my divinations?*

The Philosophers of Arithmea: *They are so intelligent that it has made them stupid. Everything is mere theory to them. They respect ideas more than reality. I can use this to my advantage. So long as I remain merely a 'potential' threat, I can attend their meetings, make suggestions, guide the group towards my final destiny. The Philosophers are the screen behind which I hide. I must retain their trust at all costs.*

The Planespiders: *They are mechanical creatures and as such are wholly predictable.*

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: *Their presence here is a blessing. The more people see them tolerating me, the more I shall be tolerated. They are the canaries in the mineshaft. If they are content, then everyone else shall be content. I must ensure that they remain content.*

Playing Bodiless Ao

Bodiless Ao is likely to be seen as a villain from the start. No matter what compromises and alliances he makes, the Player Characters are hardly going to believe that a demilich is anything other than an evil monster that they will someday have to confront. Ao knows this and has worked out a tactic to confuse the other factions.

He has decided that to present himself as eccentric, senile and more than a little mad. People can understand a gloating, sinister demilich. A *comical* demilich is something else. Ao believes that the more unpredictable and peculiar he seems, the less the other factions will regard him as a threat. They will soon come to accept his ridiculous behaviour and perhaps even to appreciate it. This situation is so tense that a little comic relief is only natural. Besides, who is to say that a demilich cannot become senile?

The Games Master should play Bodiless Ao as the fantasy cliché of an absent-minded, funny old magician with strange personal habits and a tendency to surprise those around him with mad declarations and crackpot plans. He frequently pretends to have mistaken a Player Character for someone else, in an ongoing fantasy in which he is a princess in a fairytale castle and they are the other occupants. Some of Ao's typical random utterances are:

- 'I'm nine hundred and forty-one, you know' (or some similarly huge number, never the same as it was last time he said it).
- 'Ah, that was in the Old Money.'
- 'I can't feel my legs.'
- 'Bring me my blonde wig and pearls, Melissa! I shall be the most beautiful princess of all!'
- 'I'm bored. When are the jugglers coming on?'

Ao's deeds are as haphazard as his words. He is careful to make his treatment of the different factions as erratic and inconsistent as possible, so that nobody can work out any kind of pattern to it. Typical actions include:

- Sending each character in a faction a basket of fruit with a little card to say 'thank you', with no indication of what they are being thanked for.
- Appearing without warning on a character's pillow (or under the bedclothes) with a nightcap on.
- Following a character around and humming loudly.
- Reciting eighteen-verse poems in public about how brave and noble (or mean and cowardly) a given person is.

The Sylvan Covenant: *They are less of a threat than they could be. Their attention is divided between the Court of Jasmeera, the threat to the multiverse and me. They lack focus. This is their weakness. They wish to do good, but they do not know whose voice to listen to. If they ever declared me an enemy, I would have cause for concern.*

The Threnody in Velvet: *Cretins.*

Bone Shape (New Spell)

Transmutation

Level: Clr 3, Drd 3, Sor/Wiz 5
Components: V, S, M/DF
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Target: Single bone or collection of bones, up to 10 cu. ft. + 1 cu. ft./level
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

The user of this spell can mould existing bones into any shape that suits his purposes. He can amalgamate loose bones into a single mass and can form simple walls, doors and other such shapes, but fine detail is impossible. There is a 30% chance that any shape that includes moving parts simply does not work.

Arcane Material Component: A piece of bone from a shapechanging creature.

Bodiless Ao developed this spell as a means of recycling the many tons of assorted bones he had lying about in his lair, following the various attempts to destroy him over the years. It occurred to him that bone is a tough, versatile material that has certain advantages over stone, wood or metal.

Bone as a Building Material: Bone has a Hardness of 7 and 13 hit points per inch of thickness.

The Conclave of Ashfar (Optional Faction)

The Conclave of elven wizards who helped the Player Characters in *The Drow War, Book Two* may be present here, but only if the Player Characters have thought to let them know about the gathering. They are a useful group to have here, as they are allied to the Player Characters already, trust them completely and can keep an eye on what happens while the Player Characters are away from the Skull.

If the Games Master wants to have the Conclave present without the Player Characters having arranged it, the Conclave members can have discovered the stable plane through their own divinations. However, this is not recommended, as it may come across as 'railroading'.

Alignment: Lawful Good

For the statistics of Nimian Archimandrus and Azbeth Celerinne, see *The Drow War, Book Two: The Dying of the Light*.

Cadfannan, Elf Wiz12/Rog3: CR 15; HD 12d4+3d6; hp 40; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +8; Grp +8; Atk +13 melee (1d6+2/15-20, *+2 keen rapier*) or +14 melee (1d4+3/19-20, *+3 hand crossbow*); Full Atk +13/+8 melee (1d6+2/15-20, *+2 keen rapier*) or +14 melee (1d4+3/19-20, *+3 hand crossbow*); SA sneak attack +2d6, spells; SQ elf traits, evasion, trapfinding, trap sense +1; AL NG; SV: Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +9; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +7, Concentration +18, Hide +9, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (local) +18, Listen +2, Move Silently +9, Profession (sailor) +15, Search +11, Spellcraft +18, Spot +5, Tumble +9; Combat Expertise, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Scribe Scroll[B], Silent Spell[B], Still Spell[B], Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Evocation), Weapon Finesse.

Spells Prepared (4/5/5/5/3/3/2, save DC 13 + spell level): 0th *– read magic, detect magic (2), mage hand;* 1st *– mage armour, charm person, disguise self, expeditious retreat, shocking grasp;* 2nd *– scorching ray, spider climb, flaming sphere, detect thoughts, rope trick;* 3rd *– lightning bolt, dispel magic, hasten, explosive runes, hold person;* 4th *– charm monster, ice storm, dimension door;* 5th *–mage's faithful hound, cone of cold, telekinesis;* 6th *– chain lightning, transformation.*

Equipment & Treasure: +1 studded leather armour, +2 keen rapier, +3 hand crossbow, potion of bull's strength (2), boots of elvenkind, greater metamagic rod (still spell), ring of force shield

Cadrivaine, Elf Wiz12/Lor3: CR 15; HD 12d4 plus 3d4; hp 37; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 16, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +7; Grp +7; Atk +7 melee (1d6+2, *+2 quarterstaff*); Full Atk +7/+2 melee (1d6+2, *+2 quarterstaff*); SA spells; SQ elf traits, lore, secrets of inner strength, lore of true stamina; AL LG; SV: Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +13; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Appraise +9, Concentration +15, Decipher Script +19, Gather Information +7, Handle Animal +6, Knowledge (arcana) +24, Knowledge (history) +24, Knowledge (geography) +21, Knowledge (the planes) +21, Profession (librarian) +7, Spellcraft +19; Brew Potion[B], Craft Magical Arms and Armour, Craft Rod[B], Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Skill Focus (Knowledge (arcana)), Skill Focus (Knowledge (history)), Scribe Scroll[B], Spell Focus (Divination).

Spells Prepared (4/5/5/5/5/4/3/2/1, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th *– detect magic (3), read magic;* 1st *– shield, mage armour,*

comprehend languages, identify, unseen servant; 2nd *– detect thoughts, locate object, see invisibility, misdirection, fox's cunning;* 3rd *– dispel magic, nondetection, arcane sight, clairaudience/clairvoyance, tongues;* 4th *–arcane eye, detect scrying, locate creature, scrying, mnemonic enhancer;* 5th *– mage's private sanctum, contact other plane, teleport* (2)*;* 6th *– analyse dweomer, legend lore, true seeing;* 7th *– greater scrying, vision;* 8th *– discern location.*

Lore (Ex): Cadrivaine has the ability to know legends or information regarding various topics, just as a bard can with bardic knowledge. He adds his level and his Intelligence modifier to the lore check, which otherwise functions exactly like a bardic knowledge check.

Equipment & Treasure: +2 quarterstaff, ring of protection +3

Attitude to Other Factions

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'It is almost unbelievable what has happened to them. One feels guilty to look them in the eye. We are all thinking the same thing: it could so easily have been *our* world that was destroyed. They present themselves as flinty and determined but this is not the truth. They are grieving, and a man who is grieving is in a kind of madness. If we had met them before the death of their world, we would think them sound allies. Now, we cannot be so sure. They have not had time to grow accustomed to the truth of their loss, and that makes them dangerous.'

The Legions of the Realm Imponderable: 'Cadrivaine found an image of creatures like these, in an etched copper scroll that was older than the foundation stones of the Cathedral of Sephardia. Whatever they are, they are *old*. We would like to know more about them, but we feel they are unlikely to give us any information for free.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'They should stay here at the Skull, keeping the home fires burning, healing and entertaining those who need it. That would be best for all of us. If they try to help, they will only get into trouble. In truth, they should not really be here at all. I fear we will have to chase after them to prevent them going off on ill-advised jaunts.'

Bodiless Ao: 'Although he seems mad, he is obviously here for a reason. If he were on the side of the enemy, then he would have acted before now. We have to learn what we can from him, but keep him at arm's length. He may be the enemy of our enemy, but that does not make him our friend.'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'They ought not to be here. They are *drow*. We can understand the ignorance of those who do not hail from our world, but we expect the Starborn to recognise the threat that they pose. The drow work through stealth and misdirection, setting friends against one another. It would be just like the Ennead to sow discord between ourselves and our Starborn comrades by introducing this gang of decadents into the Assembly.'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'They could make strong allies but they seem too entrenched in their own beliefs. When you are being *wild* all the time, you cannot easily make new friends. Still, we shall hope for the best, and extend the hand of friendship to them. We are not too proud to run with these wolves, if that is what it takes to build trust.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'We are very wary of them. They resemble us too much… perhaps they are a dark reflection of what we could become. If the Starborn must socialise with them, then so be it, but even in such times as these, there will always be those who are thinking of themselves first. They will use you if they can, and they will make sure you enjoy the experience.'

The Planespiders: 'They seem afraid. When an emotionless construct seems afraid, then we should all worry.'

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'We hope they are the gang of fiendish buffoons that they appear to be on the surface, because if they are not, then the fiends have something planned and this group are the key to it. It might be worth spending some time with them, just to find out what their plans are.'

The Court of Jasmeera

A group of tall, willowy elves walks by with such grace that they seem to float above the ground. The elves' features are fine, their eyes shadowed with glittering dark dust, their mouths sensuous and full, stained the colour of ripe plums. Their clothing is diaphanous, like purple mist. The males are androgynous; you can barely tell them apart from the females. They stroke one another's hair languorously and smile at you, extending a silent invitation to join in.

The leader is taller than the rest, with a fall of hair like fine black silk and eyes translucent as a cat's. At first glance she seems to be armoured, but as you look more closely you see that she wears nothing but black and silver paint applied with such craft that she appears to be wearing plates of metal. Her smile is sweet and knowing.

Beside her walks an elf-like female with skin and hair as white as a frozen corpse. A vapour of condensation smokes around her, as if she is as cold as ice. Her expression is blank – horribly so. There is nothing in that face to which one might appeal for mercy. She smiles, too, as she passes. The effect is to make the face even more ghastly than before. It is grotesque, as if a marble statue has suddenly tried to grin.

Jasmeera's Court are the self-appointed rulers of the Shadowlands, the night side of Ardentia. They have sworn to drive the 'occupiers' from the Summerlands and free the entities who are imprisoned there. They consider the whole of Ardentia to be their rightful territory, since they were there first.

Alignment: Chaotic Evil/Neutral Evil

Agenda: The Court is sensible enough to know that it must co-operate with others in order to save itself. The danger posed by the planequake is very real. There is, however, nothing so bad that it cannot be turned to Jasmeera's advantage. This is a *perfect* opportunity to make alliances with other groups in the expectation of getting assistance back home. Ardentia can no longer be seen as an isolated plane where one side wars perpetually on the other.

Jasmeera offers her help to any who need it, with a caveat: she warns the recipients not to forget the favours she does for them, because she will call in those favours on some future date.

Members: Excluding Jasmeera herself, there are twenty-one members of the Court here. Ten males and ten females are elven rogue/wizards who protect Jasmeera with their magic and spy on other factions. The remaining member is the Cold Maid of Sethalane (see below).

Typical Court Member, Elf Wiz12/Rog6: CR 18; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 12d4 plus 6d6; hp 51;
Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 25, touch 17, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +10; Grp +11; Atk +15 melee (1d6+3/18–20, *+2 rapier of speed*) or +18 ranged (1d8+6/x3, *+5 composite longbow* (+1 Str bonus)); Full Atk +15/+15/+10 melee (1d6+3/18–20, *+2 rapier of speed*) or +18/+13 ranged (1d8+6/x3, *+5 composite longbow* (+1 Str bonus)); SA sneak attack +3d6, spells; SQ elf traits, evasion, trap sense +2, uncanny dodge; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +12, Will +10; Str 13, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +15, Craft (alchemy or painting) +15, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +15, Profession +15, Spellcraft +17; Brew Potion, Combat Expertise, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell[B], Quicken Spell[B], Scribe Scroll[B], Silent Spell[B], Still Spell, Weapon Finesse.

Spells prepared (4/5/5/5/3/3/2, save DC 13 + spell level): 0th *– detect magic, detect poison, ghost sound, message;* 1st *– disguise self, expeditious retreat, reduce person, shield, true strike;* 2nd *– cat's grace, blur, fog cloud, hideous laughter, protection from arrows;* 3rd *– displacement, haste, keen edge, sleet storm, ray of exhaustion;* 4th *– black tentacles, greater invisibility, stoneskin;* 5th *– cloudkill, magic jar, teleport;* 6th *– antimagic field, symbol of fear.*

Equipment & Treasure: +5 composite longbow, +2 rapier of speed, arrows (20), *bracers of armour +8, ring of protection +4.*

The Cold Maid of Sethalane

This white-skinned creature is a hoary hunter who acts as Jasmeera's executioner and assassin. She serves Jasmeera's cause because she enjoys it, but she also has a personal vendetta against the Sylvan Covenant. She detests having to work alongside others and is determined to take some souls before her stay on the Skull is over, whether or not her mistress approves. She eyes Bodiless Ao with curiosity, not sure whether a fellow soul-thief is a potential future ally or a dangerous competitor.

A Knowledge (history) check (DC 30) or Bardic Knowledge check (DC 30) recalls a legend of the Cold Maid from Ashfar. She was said to have hunted human prey on the island of Chillhame before the time of the coming of the elves. She is said to have named the island herself, referring to it as 'my chill home from home'.

The Cold Maid: CR 25; Medium fey (cold); HD 46d6+598; hp 759; Init +19; Spd 30 ft.; AC 46, touch 36, flat-footed 35; Base Atk +23; Grp +37; Atk +46 melee (1d8+27/17–20 plus 1d6 plus *binding, +6 keen longsword of binding*); Full Atk +46/+41/+36/+31 melee (1d8+27/17–20 plus 1d6 plus *binding, +6 keen longsword of binding*); SA spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10/epic and cold iron, immunity to cold, spell resistance 36, vulnerability to fire; AL NE; SV Fort +28, Ref +36, Will +31; Str 38, Dex 33, Con 36, Int 21, Wis 23, Cha 26.

Skills & Feats: Diplomacy +14, Hide +60, Intimidate +57, Knowledge (geography) +54, Knowledge (nature) +54, Listen +55, Move Silently +60, Ride +60, Search +54, Sense Motive +55, Spot +55, Survival +55; Blind-Fight, Cleave, Dire Charge, Epic Weapon Focus (longsword), Great Cleave, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Overwhelming Critical (longsword0, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Superior Initiative, Track, Trample, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Binding (Sp): A critical hit from the Cold Maid's blade (or the blow that would kill a foe or render him unconscious) does not wound her prey. Instead the victim is bodily transported as per a *soul binding* spell heightened to 16th level (DC 30) into a diamond at the end of her sword's hilt.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *discern location, fog cloud, hold monster, plane shift, true strike;* 3/day – *dimensional anchor, dominate monster, greater dispel magic;* 1/day – *contingent resuscitating recall* (see below), *mage's disjunction.* Caster level is 23rd and the save DC is 18 + spell level.

Note: Contingent resuscitating recall is a variation on an epic spell. When slain, the Cold Maid and her mount are actually transported back to the dreary lake of Sethalane in the Shadowlands, where she is restored from the brink of death. The only way to truly slay her is to defeat her in Ardentia after this epic spell has been exhausted for the day.

Equipment & Treasure: +6 keen longsword of binding.

Queen Jasmeera

The queen of the Shadowlands is one of the mightiest wizards to walk the planes close to Ashfar. From her Chateau of Lambent Flames, she has ruled over her moonlit realm for seventeen centuries, pursuing her dogged war against the Summerlands and their defenders. Now an unknown force threatens both the light and the dark sides of her world and so, for the first time in over a millennium, the reclusive queen has set forth from her lair.

Jasmeera is polite, charming and excellent company. Those who spend time talking to her are often surprised that she is not more traditionally 'evil' in her ways. She does not leer, gloat, rage or make bombastic threats. There is no *performance* involved, possibly because she is quite secure in her own power and does not need to buttress it with theatrics.

Her actions, rather than her personality and demeanour, are what is evil about her. She kills those who get in her way, tortures creatures to extract information and destroys what she cannot control. None of this is ever done with any obvious malice. To her, it is as natural as breathing.

Queen Jasmeera, Female Elf Wiz28: CR 28; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 28d4 (+168 with *bracers*); hp 70 (238 with *bracers*); Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 41, touch 23, flat-footed 35; Base Atk +14; Grp +14; Atk +14 melee (1d6, *staff of the magi*); Full Atk +14/+9 melee (1d6, *staff of the magi*); SA spells; SQ elf traits; AL CE; SV Fort +15, Ref +15, Will +14; Str 11, Dex 14 (22 with *gloves*), Con 11 (23 with *bracers*), Int 20, Wis 8, Cha 15.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +37, Craft (embroidery) +21, Craft (painting) +21, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Listen +1, Search +8, Spellcraft +36, Spot +1; Brew Potion[B], Craft Staff[B], Craft Wondrous Item[B], Dodge, Empower Spell[B], Epic Spell Focus (enchantment), Epic Spellcasting[B], Greater Spell Focus (enchantment), Intensify Spell, Maximise Spell[B], Multispell, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll[B], Spell Focus (enchantment), Still Spell.

Spells prepared (4/6/5/5/5/5/4/4/4/4, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th *– dancing lights, detect magic, read magic, touch of fatigue;* 1st *–charm person, expeditious retreat, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, shield, true strike;* 2nd *– fox's cunning, hideous laughter (2), touch of idiocy (2);* 3rd *– dispel magic, displacement, fly, hold person (2);* 4th *– charm monster (2), confusion, crushing despair, detect scrying;* 5th *– dominate person, feeblemind, hold monster (2), mind fog;* 6th *– forceful hand, greater heroism, mass suggestion, symbol of persuasion;* 7th *– ethereal jaunt, insanity, mass hold person, power word blind;* 8th *– antipathy, dimensional lock, irresistible dance, mass charm monster;* 9th *– dominate monster, gate, intensified fireball, wish.*

Epic spells developed: Dragon knight, greater spell resistance, let go of me, spell worm.

Epic spells prepared: Greater spell resistance, let go of me, spell worm.

Equipment & Treasure: +10 body paint of armouring (full plate), bracers of epic health +12, gloves of epic dexterity +8, ring of epic protection +7, staff of the magi.

Attitudes towards Other Factions

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'So much abyssal power in one place is pleasant to see. The poor things must be suffering, though. Everybody else is doing what they do and doing it better. They are used to being feared but Bodiless Ao is more frightening than they. They pride themselves on their evil but we are far more creative. Poor demons. Poor redundant things.'

Bodiless Ao: 'Apparently, we should not be prejudiced against him just because he happens to be an undead fright with obscene amounts of power. We should listen to what he has to say, because he is a genius who specialises in planar mechanics. Well, if he is that much of a genius, why does he need the help of an alliance? Why not act alone? He knows more than he is admitting and that makes him a threat.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'What wonderfully earnest people! Elves like ourselves, too! We must have them over for drinks. Let us find out what they know.'

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'I believe we should offer them all the solace and comfort we can. They have forgotten how to relax. We have embraces that can calm their grieving hearts and soften those iron thews. They will learn to love us and forget those whom they have lost. Is this not a kindness?'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'Obviously, they are a puppet faction – probably just constructs. Somebody here is controlling them, like puppets on strings. Their function is to support whatever the true master proposes. A clever trick, but not one that any clever person would fall for.'

The Philosophers of Arithmea: 'They are dull as stale cheese but we must all place our trust in them. They know what is best. Minds must rule over hearts for now.'

The Planespiders: 'Useless! All they know how to do is react. They see a hole, they patch it. That is the extent of their contribution. What good will they be?'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'They do not belong here. Through subtle cruelty and humiliation, we shall make this place unbearable for them and force them to leave. It is for the best. They are nothing but silly children and this crisis is serious.'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'It is about time that those louts learned the value of a negotiating table. For years we have tried to parley with them; the only way to get their attention

has been through acts of violence. Like the hypocrites they are, they accuse *us* of being involved in this planequake – as if we would be so foolish as to doom ourselves along with them!'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'They have massive potential but no strong guidance. Their anarchy is mere adolescent rebellion, founded on memories of repression, not the wild glory of those who are strong enough not to need rules. From what we know of them, evil is in their blood. They should accept it as a source of strength.'

Body Paint of Armouring

This invention of Jasmeera's allows her to benefit from the equivalent of magical armour without being burdened by the real thing. The *body paint* comes in a small pot with a brush. When applied in such a way as to resemble armour, it confers an armour bonus to Armour Class equivalent to that of the armour type portrayed, along with an enhancement bonus ranging from +2 to +10. This leaves the wrists free to wear something other than *bracers of armour.*

The person applying the *body paint*, who cannot be the same person who uses it, must succeed at a Craft (painting) check (DC 20 plus the armour bonus of the intended armour) or the dose of *body paint* is wasted. The paint takes ten minutes to apply per point of armour bonus. Special abilities cannot be worked into the painted-on armour.

The *body paint* lasts until the user has been dealt a total of 50 points of damage from any source. Damage absorbed by damage reduction does not count towards this total. Only damage that has been deducted from the user's hit points is counted.

Hygrave's Huntsmen

This group is made up of weary-looking fighting men, long-haired and unshaven. Their armour, which was obviously fine once, is now weather-beaten and in need of repair. They have the look of knights on an unending quest or veterans from a war that they still fight when the rest of the world has given up. The horses on which they ride are strange, glossy black stallions with no eyes at all, just hollow sockets; they seem to be completely blind, guided entirely by their riders.

This band of stalwart fighters was given its name by the monarch of their country, Arkossa, following their successful quest to hunt down the king's corrupt brother and bring him to justice. He named them hunters of men, after which they were given the special responsibility of locating and neutralising any threat to the kingdom. Their home had many enemies, many of whom were exceptionally powerful in magic and tried to strike from secure bases in other dimensions. Thus their 'hunts' often took them to other planes, hounding down their quarry wherever he might try to hide.

The Huntsmen had set off in pursuit of Azrique Malfaisance, a lich-queen who had been sending spiteful pestilence against some of the outlying villages of Arkossa. When Malfaisance retreated to the Astral Plane, the Huntsmen spurred their banesteeds to follow her. They tracked the lich across gulfs of astral space and were about to discover the gateway to her private citadel when the planequake struck. Vast billows of protomatter hurled them far apart from their prey and left them bewildered. They attempted to return to Arkossa to seek the counsel of their mages, only to find that Arkossa, like Sakurafu, was completely gone.

Arkossa was the very epicentre of the planequake. It was the destruction of the Huntsmen's home that caused the quake to happen. Numb and heartbroken beyond words, the Huntsmen turned to the Philosophers of Arithmea in the hope of finding answers, which in turn prompted the creation of the alliance.

Alignment: Lawful Neutral

Agenda: The Huntsmen are determined to take revenge on the destroyers of their world. They have elected themselves the protectors of the Assembly, without asking whether anyone wanted that protection. They are still shell-shocked from Arkossa's destruction. Some are in denial, insisting that a whole plane cannot have been shattered; it must be an illusion, or a trick of some kind. Hygrave, their leader, knows in his heart that Arkossa is gone.

Members: There are seven Huntsmen in total, including Hygrave. They ride upon banesteeds, for which see Appendix 3: New Monsters.

Typical Huntsman, Human Rgr20: CR 20; Medium humanoid; HD 20d8; hp 90; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 24, touch 13, flat-footed 21; Base Atk +20; Grp +23; Atk +24 melee (1d8+4/x3, *+1 spear of axiomatic power*) or +24 ranged (1d8+4 plus 3d6 acid, *+1 composite longbow of acidic blast* (+3 Str bonus)); Full Atk +24/+19/+14/+9 melee (1d8+4/x3, *+1 spear of axiomatic power*) or +24/+19/+14/+9 ranged (1d8+4 plus 3d6 acid, *+1 composite longbow of acidic blast* (+3 Str bonus)) or +22/+22/+17/+12/+7 ranged (1d8+4 plus 3d6 acid, *+1 composite longbow of acidic blast* (+3 Str bonus)); SA favoured enemies, spells; SQ camouflage, evasion, hide in plain sight, swift tracker, woodland stride; AL LN; SV Fort +12, Ref +15, Will +8; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Handle Animal +24, Hide +15, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +14, Move Silently +15, Ride +26, Search +8, Spot +19, Survival +25; Dodge, Endurance[B], Improved Precise Shot[B], Manyshot[B], Mobility, Mounted Archery,

Mounted Combat, Rapid Shot[B], Ride-By Attack, Shot on the Run, Spirited Charge, Track[B].

Favoured Enemies and Associated Bonus: undead +6; fey +4; outsiders (chaotic) +4; outsiders (evil) +4; dragons +2.

Manyshot: A huntsman's Manyshot feat allows him to fire multiple arrows at a single target within 30 feet as a standard action. For convenience, the number of extra arrows allowed and the accompanying attack roll penalty is given here: two arrows: –4; three arrows: –6; four arrows: –8. Damage reduction and other resistances apply separately against each arrow fired. If a critical hit is scored, only the first arrow fired deals critical damage; all others deal regular damage.

Spells prepared (4/4/3/3, save DC 12 + spell level): 1st – *alarm, hide from animals, pass without trace, resist energy;* 2nd – *barkskin, hold animal, cat's grace, speak with plants;* 3rd – *cure moderate wounds, tree shape, water walk;* 4th – *commune with nature, cure serious wounds, freedom of movement*.

Equipment & Treasure: +8 studded leather armour, +1 spear of axiomatic power, +1 composite longbow of acidic blast, arrows (20).

Note: The court wizard of Arkossa, Irillian the Magnificent, forged the Huntsmen's spears, longbows and armour as gifts for the king's favourites. When a *+1 spear of axiomatic power* strikes a chaotic target, it deals +3d6 points of bonus lawful damage and the target gains one negative level; this negative level may be removed after 24 hours with a successful Fortitude save (DC 23). On a successful critical hit, the spear deals +6d6 points of lawful damage and bestows two negative levels.

Animal Companion, Hawk: CR –; Tiny magical beast; HD 7d8; hp 31; Init +5; Spd 10 ft., fly 60 ft. (average); AC 25, touch 17, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +5; Grp –4; Atk +12 melee (1d4–1, talons); Full Atk +12 melee (1d4–1, talons); Space/Reach 2½ ft./0 ft.; SQ devotion, evasion, link, low-light vision, share spells; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +4; Str 9, Dex 20, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 14, Cha 6.

Skills & Feats: Listen +7, Spot +19; Alertness, Multiattack[B], Weapon Finesse[B].

Hygrave

Hygrave is a haunted man. His crow-black hair and sunken eyes give him the look of something half-dead. With the destruction of Arkossa, he has lost everything he ever owned and everyone he ever knew, save for a few acquaintances on other planes. His role as Lord Fnut's bodyguard and general protector-cum-policeman of the Assembly is all that sustains him now. He is clinging to his duty in order to stay sane. The nature of the cause is irrelevant; faithfulness to a cause is all he has left.

Hygrave, Human Rgr24: CR 24; Medium humanoid; HD 24d8+20; hp 128; Init +3; Spd 30 ft; AC 24, touch 13, flat-footed 21; Base Atk +22; Grp +25; Atk +33 melee (1d8+12/x3, *Fleeting Shadow*) or +26 ranged (1d8+4 plus 3d6 acid, *+1 composite longbow of acidic blast* (+3 Str bonus)); Full Atk +33/+28/+23/+18 melee (1d8+12/x3, *Fleeting Shadow*) or +26/+21/+16/+11 ranged (1d8+4 plus 3d6 acid, *+1 composite longbow of acidic blast* (+3 Str bonus)) or +24/+/24/+19/+14/+9 ranged (1d8+4 plus 3d6 acid, *+1 composite longbow of acidic blast* (+3 Str bonus)); SA favoured enemies, spells; SQ camouflage, evasion, hide in plain sight, swift tracker, woodland stride; AL LN; SV Fort +14, Ref +17, Will +10; Str 16, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Handle Animal +28, Hide +21, Knowledge (nature) +16, Listen +14, Move Silently +15, Ride +26, Search +8, Spot +19, Survival +29; Combat Archery, Dodge, Endurance[B], Epic Toughness, Improved Precise Shot[B], Manyshot[B], Mobility, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Rapid Shot[B], Ride-By Attack, Shot on the Run, Spirited Charge, Track[B].

Spells prepared (4/4/3/3, save DC 12 + spell level): 1st – *alarm, hide from animals, pass without trace, resist energy;* 2nd – *barkskin, hold animal, cat's grace, speak with plants;* 3rd – *cure moderate wounds, tree shape, water walk;* 4th – *commune with nature, cure serious wounds, freedom of movement*.

Equipment & Treasure: +8 studded leather armour, +1 composite longbow of acidic blast, arrows (20), *Fleeting Shadow* (*+8 spear of magical beast dread*; see page 59).

Equipment & Treasure: Hygrave currently has one negative level because he is wielding an intelligent weapon of a different alignment. This gives him –1 on all skill checks and ability checks, -1 on attack rolls and saves and -5 hit points. He also has one less effective level. These alterations are not factored into the above statistics.

Animal Companion, Hawk: CR –; Tiny magical beast; HD 9d8; hp 40; Init +5; Spd 10 ft., fly 60 ft. (average); AC 27, touch 17, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +6; Grp –2; Atk +13 melee (1d4, talons); Full Atk +13 melee (1d4, talons); Space/Reach 2½ ft./0 ft.; SQ devotion, evasion, link, low-light vision, share spells; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +11, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 21, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 14, Cha 6.

Skills & Feats: Listen +9, Spot +19; Alertness, Dodge, Multiattack[B], Weapon Finesse[B].

Attitudes towards Other Factions

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'They are not so worthless that they cannot be used for something. Let us send them in first to fight our foes. Then, when they are cut down, we will have solved two problems at once.'

Fleeting Shadow, the Spear of the Beastslayer

The intelligent spear born by Hygrave, *Fleeting Shadow*, was not created on Arkossa, unlike the rest of his faction's magical items.

While scouting an arid desert plane for signs of a fleeing conspirator, Hygrave found the spear thrust through the ribs of a skeletal beast around the size of the tarrasque, beneath which was the skeleton of the hunter who had borne it, evidently crushed to death in the beast's death throes. Through telepathy, the spear asked to be taken from this bony prison and used once again. It had not tasted blood in many dry, dusty centuries. Hygrave obliged, with some reluctance.

Fleeting Shadow's original owner had loved to hunt for the joy of hunting, seeking out the most exotic, powerful magical beasts and bringing them down. He would hunt a unicorn or a hieracosphinx with equal glee. Alignment was nothing; the kill was everything. His craving for trophies led him to far-off planes where he would seek out the strangest and most challenging beasts he could find.

Now *Fleeting Shadow* is a weapon at odds with its bearer. Hygrave bears the spear because he finds it valuable in combat, despite the negative level it bestows on him. He hunts only to serve a greater purpose, not to kill for the pleasure of it. The spear urges him to find magical beasts to slay, threatening to turn on his companions if he does not. Its ego is so powerful that he has had no choice but to do this. If the Player Characters bring magical companions or familiars to the Skull, the spear aches to kill them and attempts to overcome Hygrave in order to do so.

The spear hopes to find a new bearer among the many powerful personalities who have come to the Skull. If it feels that one of the Player Characters is more likely to slake its bloodlust, it sends telepathic messages, beginning with overtures of friendship and ultimately urging the Player Character to kill Hygrave and claim it.

Fleeting Shadow: *+8 spear of magical beast dread*
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Ability Scores: Intelligence 19, Wisdom 20, Charisma 12
Communication Mode: Telepathy
Special Purpose: Slay magical beasts
Powers: Wielder has free use of Combat Reflexes; wielder has free use of Improved Initiative; wielder has free use of Uncanny Dodge; wielder can use *see invisibility* at will; *shield* on wielder; *lightning bolt* (8d6 points of damage, 200 ft. range, DC 18)
Special Purpose Power: *Hold monster* (DC 24) for 1d4 rounds
Ego: 39

Bodiless Ao: 'It is an abomination. It has devoured the child's soul and placed something else in the body. When this alliance has run its course, we shall all be devoured too, unless we destroy it first. Only my word keeps me from confronting it.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'We will say this: they know what they are doing. They seem to be weary, though, as if from much struggle. We could tell them what true weariness is, we who have lost our families, our homes, our world.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'They have meddled with us before. One of their number is a legend of our people. Our tales speak of the Hoary Hunter whose prey is men. The legend is not a fair one. When this war is done, there will be a reckoning.'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'Whoever or whatever they are, we are watching them.'

The Philosophers of Arithmea: 'They are our best hope. It is well that all present can see this. Thank the Gods that we have such minds amongst us.'

The Planespiders: 'The Gods in their wisdom have provided for all woes. As wounds in the body heal, so too do the planespiders heal the wounds in the worlds. Maybe in them we have hope. Maybe through them, Arkossa could be returned to us.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'Though powerful, they are like children. We have no choice but to guard them.'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'They are fine fighters, but they are too wild. It is that simple. When we charge, we need to be sure that others are charging with us, not scooting off on some whim of their own.'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'Effete idiots who are not strong enough to be part of this company. Why are they here? Why do they act as if anyone is *scared* of them?'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable

This group of five human-sized creatures is a complete enigma. All five wear black body armour, have round featureless helmets like eggs of polished onyx that taper backwards to a point, speak in metallic whispers and have gauntleted hands that appear to end in three fingers.

Alignment: Unknown and undetectable. The black plate armour of the Legion masks any attempt to discern their alignment, their magical power or anything else at all.

Agenda: The Legion consist of five of the elven gods of Ashfar – Lumiya, Melmoth, Kyros Threadcutter, Vendyss and Valkazz – who have assumed mortal form and enclosed themselves in the black armour to disguise their true identities. They are

here to help the Player Characters as subtly and secretively as they can. They will not rush to their aid in a *deus ex machina* fashion and they want to keep the factions completely unaware of their true purpose.

Their reason for joining the Assembly in disguise is simple. If one group of gods openly joined the alliance trying to prevent the collapse of the planes, another would side with the antagonists in the hope of being rewarded for its loyalty and spared destruction. There are always those who want to keep themselves alive by joining an aggressor. Soon it would be god against god and the apocalypse would be a fact instead of just a possibility.

The Legion also feel personally obligated to help. Word has reached them secretly from their sister, the pale goddess Arosi who is worshipped by drow and elves alike, that the spider-goddess She is in league with the force that is destroying the planes and expects to take on supreme power in a new universe to come. Although they are gods, the Legion have no power to locate She and thwart her. Their only option has been to come down to where the mortals are trying to set things right and do what they can to help.

The Philosophers of Arithmea

The group before you is entirely made up of old men. Tall, grave and lacking in hair, they acknowledge you with a glance. They wear flowing robes decorated in garish colours. Some of them carry complicated-looking devices made from interconnected metal rods.

The Philosophers are the *de facto* chairmen of the group. With their neutral outlook, insistence upon tolerance of other points of view and profound knowledge of arcane matters, they are the natural founding force for an alliance such as this. All of the other factions hold the Philosophers in respect. Nobody sees them as a threat, as they never seem to take offence, refuse to take part in combat and only use their magic to find out new knowledge or to defend themselves. They are therefore trusted.

Unfortunately, their innately philosophical outlook makes them very poor leaders. They are more concerned with presenting all possible points of view than with taking decisive action.

The metal devices are called *pranoni*. They are foci for the mind, like three-dimensional mandalas. Manipulating a *pranona* is strangely relaxing and frees up the brain to meditate upon higher things. In game terms, a half-hour of *pranona* meditation confers a +2 equipment bonus to Concentration checks for the next ten minutes.

Alignment: Neutral

Agenda: The Philosophers simply want a return to life as it was before. They desire peace, solitude and the leisure to contemplate the infinite. They understand that this cannot happen without the intervention of heroes, so they have founded the alliance.

The Philosophers refuse to play favourites or engage in political double-dealing. Each Philosopher is devoted to the pursuit of the truth, not his own selfish goals. Intrigue is beneath them.

Members: There are five hundred Philosophers in total, though only ten play any part in the Assembly. The remainder are cloistered in their bone cells pondering the fate of the multiverse.

Typical Philosopher, Male Human Wiz10/Lor10: CR 20; Medium humanoid; HD 10d4+10 plus 10d4+10; hp 70; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +10; Grp +10; Atk +15 melee (2d6+5 nonlethal, *+5 merciful quarterstaff*); Full Atk +15/+10 melee (2d6+5 nonlethal, *+5 merciful quarterstaff*); SA spells; AL N; SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +18; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 20, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +14, Craft (alchemy) +18, Decipher Script +18, Heal +15, Knowledge (arcana) +31, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +18, Knowledge (geography) +18, Knowledge (history) +31, Knowledge (nature) +18, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +18, Knowledge (religion) +18, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Spellcraft +22, Use Magic Device +12; Brew Potion[B], Craft Magical Arms and Armour[B], Craft Staff[B], Craft Wand[B], Craft Wondrous Item[B], Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (Divination), Scribe Scroll[B], Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Knowledge (arcana)), Skill Focus (Knowledge (history)), Spell Focus (Divination).

Loremaster Secrets: Applicable Knowledge, Dodge Trick, Secret Knowledge of Avoidance, Secrets of Inner Strength, The Lore of True Stamina.

Lore: The Philosopher has the ability to know legends or information regarding various topics, just as a bard can with bardic knowledge. He adds his level and his Intelligence modifier to the lore check, which otherwise functions exactly like a bardic knowledge check.

Greater Lore (Ex): The Philosopher has the ability to understand magic items, as if with the *identify* spell.

True Lore (Ex): Once per day, the Philosopher can use his knowledge to gain the effect of a *legend lore* spell or an *analyze dweomer* spell.

Spells prepared (4/6/5/5/5/5/4/4/4/4, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, detect poison, light, read magic;* 1st – *comprehend languages, detect secret doors, detect undead, mage armour, shield;* 2nd – *arcane lock, detect thoughts, locate object, protection from arrows, see invisibility;* 3rd – *arcane sight, clairaudience/clairvoyance, dispel magic, nondetection, tongues;* 4th – *arcane eye, detect scrying, locate creature, mnemonic enhancer, scrying;* 5th – *contact other plane, dismissal, mage's private sanctum, prying eyes, telepathic bond;* 6th – *globe of invulnerability, greater dispel magic, true seeing* (2)*;* 7th – *banishment, greater arcane sight, greater scrying, mage's magnificent mansion;* 8th – *discern location, greater prying eyes, mind blank, protection from spells;* 9th – *astral projection, etherealness, gate, wish.*

Equipment & Treasure: +5 merciful quarterstaff.

Lord Fnut

The chief Philosopher of Arithmea is Lord Fnut, a tall and stately gentleman with tufts of white hair above his ears. He wears a small moonstone on his brow and long robes of silk painted with the images of peacock feathers. He likes nothing better than to relax with a hookah full of strong tobacco, a nice cup of green tea and some companions to debate with.

Attitudes towards Other Factions

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'They are an unruly menace, but at least they are on our side for the moment.'

Bodiless Ao: 'If one such as he is afraid, then we should all be afraid. He is evil, but that is not germane to our work. Until he betrays us or interferes with our efforts, we have no reason to condemn him. One cannot punish a creature for what he *might* do.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'They seem a little too accustomed to being listened to. They must let others have their say.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'I am glad the Sylvan Covenant is here to hold them in check, or they would surely dominate this Assembly. Jasmeera is one of life's dominators.'

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'They are loyal and steadfast, despite their tragedy. Were it not for them, we would have no guardians. We are eternally grateful.'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'Only a fool or a meddler presents himself as an enigma at a time when we are trying to answer questions!'

The Planespiders: 'They are not the most creative of thinkers. I believe they will be of more use when it is time to repair the damage, since they do not seem to know how to find its source.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'They would rather play than work. This is not a game. I hope that they become more serious.'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'Bold and resourceful, yes, but they must not waste their energy in old feuds! Time enough for that when the multiverse is stable once again!'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'They contribute little and demand much trust. Perhaps a time will come when they prove themselves.'

The Planespiders

The creatures before you look like large spiders made from gleaming metal and glass. Each has a reddish glow pulsing at the rear of its body, like that a firefly. They speak to one another in identical neutral, metallic voices.

These highly intelligent arachnids originate from a lawful neutral plane called Coax, where they build magical thinking machines to perform stupendous calculations far beyond the powers of human minds to grasp. A small group of volunteers dwells on the Astral Plane, from whence they observe the behaviours of other planes and intervene to prevent the worlds from becoming muddled. Recently a vast number of planespiders has been deployed from Coax to patch up the rents that the planequake has torn in the fabric of the Astral Plane.

A planespider's greatest concern is to keep everything in its proper place. This means dispatching troublesome extraplanar creatures back to their own planes whenever possible. If a creature will not go willingly, the planespider attempts to erase it with its *disintegration ray*. To the spider, all extraplanar creatures appear as anomalies – disruptions of the perfect order of the universe. Creatures who have survived encounters with planespiders report that a lengthy, reasoned argument can persuade a planespider to show mercy, while an appeal to its (presumably nonexistent) better nature is likely to result in disintegration.

The spiders are able to open and close rifts between the worlds. The spiders' metallic leg blades are sharp enough to cut through reality itself, creating holes into parallel worlds, while their webbing has the power to bind errant planar phenomena back into place.

The Player Characters may have already encountered Bronderbok, a planespider attempting to regulate the planar rifts beneath the citadel of Bastirak, in *The Drow War, Book Two*. Planespiders share information and keep records of threats. If the Player Characters were violent toward any of the planespiders in the past or sabotaged the seals they placed over the rifts, the planespiders here at the Skull know about it and are therefore Unfriendly. On the other hand, if the Player Characters helped Bronderbok, this is remembered in their favour.

Alignment: Lawful Neutral

Agenda: The planespiders care nothing for plots and plans. They want to find out what is going wrong and fix it. When the cause of the disruption is dealt with, it will be time to clean up the mess. Anyone who does not go back to his own plane willingly will be *sent* back.

Members: There are eight planespiders present, including their leader, Sobrilik. He is identical to any other specimen of his race.

Typical Planespider: CR 15; Large outsider (extraplanar, lawful); HD 20d8+20; hp 110; Init +7; Spd 60 ft., climb 30 ft.; AC 36, touch 16, flat-footed 29; Base Atk +20; Grp +35; Atk +31 melee (2d6+11/19–20, claw); Full Atk +31 melee (2d6+11/19–20, 4 claws); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA anchor web, cocoon, *disintegration ray*, spell-like abilities, stitch rift; SQ damage reduction 15/chaos, darkvision 60 ft., planar sense, spell resistance 31, telepathy 100 ft.; AL LN; SV Fort +13, Ref +19, Will +15; Str 33, Dex 24, Con 13, Int 23, Wis 16, Cha 11.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +24, Diplomacy +25, Hide +26, Knowledge (arcana) +29, Jump +34, Knowledge (the planes) +29, Listen +26, Move Silently +30, Sense Motive +26, Sleight of Hand +30, Spellcraft +31, Spot +26, Survival +26, Use Rope +30; Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Critical (claw), Improved Natural Attack (claw), Mobility, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (claw).

Anchor Web (Sp): A planespider's webbing has an anchoring effect, counteracting attempts to move through the planes. As a standard action, a planespider can throw a sheet of webbing eight times per day. This is similar to an attack with a net but has a maximum range of 50 feet with a range increment of ten feet, and is effective against targets of up to Large size. The web anchors the target in place, allowing no movement. The target is also subjected to the effects of a *dimensional lock*, with a caster level of 18th. An entangled creature can escape with a Escape Artist check (DC 21) or burst the web with a Strength check (DC 25). The check DCs are Constitution-based and the Strength check DC includes a +4 racial bonus. The web has 21 hit points, hardness 3 and damage reduction 10/chaos.

Planespiders can also create sheets of sticky webbing from five to 60 feet square. They often place these in front of gates that they are working to close, so as to catch rogue creatures coming through the rift. Approaching creatures must succeed

on a Spot check (DC 20) to notice a web, or they stumble into it and become trapped as though by a successful web attack. Attempts to escape or burst the webbing receive a +5 bonus if the trapped creature has something to walk on or grab while pulling free. Each five-foot-square section has 21 hit points, hardness 3 and damage reduction 10/chaos.

A planespider can move across its own sheet web at its climb speed and can determine the exact location of any creature touching the web. It can cut its own web as easily as it can cut tissue. A creature who hacks off a dead planespider's forelimb can use it to slice through the webs that planespider (or another) has created.

Cocoon (Ex): Creatures a planespider considers anomalous but non-threatening are tagged for removal back to their original planes. The spider attempts to cocoon them for easy transportation. A planespider who successfully pins an opponent can attempt to hurriedly enwrap it in a cocoon of webbing. Creatures of Medium size or smaller are wrapped in one round. The planespider must maintain the pin for two rounds to enwrap a Large size opponent, four rounds for a Huge opponent and eight rounds for a Gargantuan opponent.

Partially wrapped creatures are considered entangled in the web as if hit by a web attack (see above). Completely wrapped creatures cannot take any actions at all. They can breathe but they cannot move or speak and are considered helpless. Unless an enwrapped creature has some means of taking actions without moving at all (such as casting a stilled, silent spell), it is at the planespider's mercy and must wait until the spider or some other creature frees it.

Disintegration Ray (Sp): Once the planespider has identified a creature as both anomalous and threatening, it attempts to 'remove it from the matrix' by reducing it to dust. It can train a *disintegration ray* upon a target (as a ranged touch attack) once per round. Targets struck by the ray suffer the effects of a *disintegrate* spell (caster level 20th). AN Fortitude save (DC 26) is allowed; those who fail are dealt 40d6 points of damage and are disintegrated completely if reduced to zero hit points or fewer, while those who succeed are dealt 5d6 points of damage. The save DC is Intelligence-based.

Planar Sense (Su): A planespider can automatically sense the presence of any outsider (extraplanar or native) within 300 feet of itself. It also detects the use of any *summoning* spell or any spell that accesses or contacts other planes, such as *contact other plane*, *ethereal jaunt*, *plane shift* or *teleport*.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *discern lies*, *plane shift;* 3/day – *dictum*, *dismissal*, *improved invisibility*, *mass hold person*, *symbol of pain*, *symbol of sleep*, *true seeing;* 1/day – *maze*. The planespider uses these abilities as if they are spells cast by a 20th level wizard.

Stitch Rift (Sp): As a full-round action, a planespider can attempt to close any temporary gateway between the planes such as an active *gate* spell or a *teleportation circle*. It must be adjacent to the gateway to do this and must make a Concentration check if disturbed. The planespider makes a dispel check as if using *dispel magic* against the gateway. Its modifier for the check is +20. The planespider cannot close a permanent gateway or rift but can suppress it, weaving a wall of webbing across the gateway to close it off. To do this, the spider makes a dispel check as above. An affected gateway is suppressed for one hour per Hit Die of the planespider. Creatures can reopen the gateway by slicing through the webs; these have 21 hit points, hardness 3 and damage reduction 10/chaos.

Attitudes to Other Factions

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'Threat. Medium priority. They are concerned only with survival and show no respect for the proper order of things. As they are firmly on the side of chaos, we believe they will chafe at any restrictions that are placed upon them in the interests of co-operation, so we stand ready to remove them if they become problematic.'

Bodiless Ao: 'High threat potential. We do not estimate our present numbers as sufficient to engage it. If it must be neutralised, we will need many more of our number.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'We shall tolerate their presence here. They may bring no more from their home to this place. Additional entities of non-local origin will be neutralised and expelled.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'Low priority. Though they are a law unto themselves, they have no history of meddling with the planar order.'

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'They are survivors of a planar catastrophe. We are undecided as to whether they should persist when their plane has been destroyed, as this may constitute an imbalance. It may be necessary to eliminate them in the interests of harmony, once the greater problem is dealt with.'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'Insufficient data. They do not register as anomalous. They do not register at all. Possible threat.'

The Philosophers of Arithmea: 'Their stance is anti-entropic. They are not a threat.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'Non-malignant alien presence. No threat. Its presence must be tolerated while this crisis lasts. On conclusion of the crisis, it should return to its plane of origin.'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'We shall tolerate the elves. The outsiders are another matter. When possible, we shall return the outsiders to their own plane. This group is the cause of much disharmony.'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'Threat. High priority. This species was involved in planar breach before. We shall watch them closely. If they act inappropriately, we shall not hesitate to destroy them.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix

A group of colourful figures approaches, led by a smiling woman with hair that swirls weightlessly around her as if it is underwater. She has intricate patterns of metallic thread covering her skin which gleam with purple and gold light.

Her companions are like something from a child's storybook. There is a plump man with dark blue skin and a bow tie, a naked female creature with wings and a cat's head, a levitating dolphin that swims through the air and, dwarfing all the rest, a dragon with scintillating scales in all the colours of the spectrum.

Lady Myonatix is a sorceress from Halcya, one of the more morphic planes of good, where reality can be altered by imagination. She and her friends are accustomed to spending their days lying under gigantic toadstools, telling stories, making up riddles and creating psychedelic light shows, enjoying a land far from any care.

The planequake brought sudden and unfamiliar horror to that world. Halcya was not badly damaged, and the few fiends who ventured through into it found the place too intolerable to stay for long. Nonetheless, Myonatix was not willing to risk a second bout and so came to seek fellowship at the Skull.

Alignment: Neutral Good

Agenda: Myonatix is keenly aware that this Assembly contains many untrustworthy factions. Everyone is supposed to be on the same side, but surely things cannot be that simple. Myonatix's forte is illusion, and she intends to use her powers

to trick and mislead the evil members of the Assembly and test the Player Characters to see what side they are truly on.

Members: All of Myonatix's cohorts are aasimars, half-celestials or celestial creatures. They are the descendants of good outsiders. The blue-skinned man (an aasimar) is named Bombus , the cat-headed female is Ashbet (a half-celestial) and the levitating dolphin is Miri (a celestial dolphin).

Lady Myonatix

Myonatix is a playful, happy soul who has spent the greater part of her life surrounded by entities who are as good as she is. She has seen some tragedy, though not nearly so much as other beings her age. She has little grasp of how powerful she actually is.

The harmful magic she knows was learned in order to give her some powers of self-defence. She was greatly reluctant to develop the *ruin* epic spell, but her prismatic dragon friend Auberil insisted. Auberil watches over his Lady and is undoubtedly the more practical of the two.

Lady Myonatix, Female Half-Elf Sor26: CR 26; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 26d4; hp 65; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 27, touch 11, flat-footed 26; Base Atk +13; Grp +12; Atk +14 melee (1d6+1, *+2 staff of holy power*); Full Atk +14/+9 melee (1d6+1, *+2 staff of holy power*); SA spells; SQ half-elf traits; AL NG; SV Fort +9, Ref +10, Will +16; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 22 (32 with *cloak*).

Skills & Feats: Bluff +40, Concentration +29, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +13, Knowledge (arcana) +31, Listen +2, Search +3, Spellcraft +31, Spot +2; Craft Epic Wondrous Item, Enlarge Spell, Epic Spellcasting, Greater Spell Focus (Illusion), Heighten Spell, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Penetration, Widen Spell.

Spells known (6/8/8/7/7/7/7/6/6/6, save DC 16 + spell level): 0th – *dancing lights, flare, ghost sound, mending, message, open/close, prestidigitation, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st – *colour spray, mage armour, shield, silent image, ventriloquism;* 2nd – *blur, cat's grace, hypnotic pattern, invisibility, mirror image;* 3rd – *displacement, fly, lightning bolt, major image;* 4th – *greater invisibility, polymorph, rainbow pattern, solid fog;* 5th – *permanency, persistent image, seeming, shadow evocation;* 6th – *disintegrate, mislead, programmed image;* 7th – *mass hold person, project image, waves of exhaustion;* 8th – *mass charm monster, scintillating pattern, telekinetic sphere;* 9th – *prismatic sphere, shades, weird*.

Epic spells known (3, save DC 26): dreamscape, ruin, sweet dreams (see sidebar).

Equipment & Treasure: +2 staff of holy power, amulet of natural armour +6, bracers of armour +10, cloak of epic charisma +10.

Sweet Dreams (New Epic Spell)

Transmutation
Spellcraft DC: 33
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Close
Effect: 20-ft. radius
Duration: 20 hours; permanent for age adjustment
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)
To Develop: 297,000 gp, 6 days, 11,880 xp. Seed: fortify (DC 17), change from touch to target and from target to area (+16), increase enhancement bonus (+10), mitigating factor: only works on sleeping creatures, takes effect on waking (ad hoc, –10)

This spell only affects sleeping creatures within the area of effect. The creature enjoys especially pleasurable and relaxing dreams. On waking, the creature receives a +6 enhancement bonus to Constitution, which lasts for the next 20 hours.

Auberil (Prismatic Dragon)

Auberil is Myonatix's loyal bodyguard and friend. Although he is younger than she is, he has much more of a grasp of the real world and its manifold dangers than she does.

Auberil, Male Prismatic Dragon: CR 22; Gargantuan dragon; HD 33d12+297; hp 511; Init +0; Spd 60 ft., fly 300 ft. (clumsy); AC 47, touch 15, flat-footed 47; Base Atk +33; Grp +58; Atk +43 melee (4d6+13/19–20, bite); Full Atk +43 melee (4d6+13/19–20, bite) and +41 melee (2d8+6, 2 claws) plus +40 melee (2d6+6, 2 wings) plus +40 melee (2d8+19, tail slap); Space/Reach 20 ft./15 ft.; SA breath weapon, crush 4d6+19 (DC 35), frightful presence (DC 35), *hypnotic pattern*, spell-like abilities, spells, tail sweep 2d6+19 (DC 35); SQ damage reduction 15/magic, deflecting force, immune to blindness, immune to light; AL NG; SV Fort +27, Ref +18, Will +27; Str 37, Dex 10, Con 29, Int 28, Wis 29, Cha 28.

Skills & Feats: Balance +16, Bluff +27, Climb +49, Concentration +45, Diplomacy +45, Gather Information +45, Heal +29, Intimidate +45, Jump +29, Knowledge (arcana) +27, Knowledge (the planes) +27, Listen +45, Move Silently +25, Perform (sing) +45, Search +25, Sense Motive +45, Spellcraft +45, Spot +29, Survival +29, Use Magic Device +29; Blinding Speed, Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Combat Casting, Improved Critical (bite) , Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).

Breath Weapon (Su): Auberil can produce a *prismatic spray* effect as a breath weapon. This has a 60-foot cone area of effect. The save DC is 35.

Deflecting Force (Su): A shield of shimmering light surrounds Auberil that provides a deflection bonus to his Armour Class. The deflection bonus is equal to his Charisma modifier.

Immune to Light and Blindness (Ex): Auberil cannot be harmed by any light, including Evocation [light] spells, *searing light* and the various *prismatic (sphere, spray, wall*) spells. In addition, he is immune to any spell or effect that causes blindness.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *hypnotic pattern* (DC 19). Caster level is 11th. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Sorcerer spells known (7/7/7/7/7/5, save DC 19 + spell level): 0th *– arcane mark, detect magic, flare, ghost sound, light, mage hand, message, read magic, resistance;* 1st *– grease, magic missile, protection from evil, ray of enfeeblement, true strike;* 2nd *– detect thoughts, hideous laughter, mirror image, scorching ray, shatter;* 3rd *– blink, dispel magic, displacement, slow;* 4th *– ice storm, resilient sphere, stoneskin;* 5th *– break enchantment, telekinesis.*

Attitudes towards Other Factions

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'They mock us, but we rise above it. After all, they are demons. You have to expect it of them. It is their nature.'

Bodiless Ao: 'He is so *horrible.* We are trying our best not to judge, however. Maybe there is a little good in everyone deep down, even in a demilich. If not, then we know what to do.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'We like them well enough, but they seem to be impatient with us. We will test them and discover what they are truly about.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'We are not as foolish as they think we are. We know spiteful manipulation when we see it. They are trying to woo us with flattery, but we can see through their games.'

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'We pity them and grieve for their loss. It is a shame that they are running away from their grief. Their obsession with hunting and fighting distracts them from the pain inside. They should have the courage to ask to be comforted. We could help them to heal.'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'We confess that we are wildly curious to know what is inside that black armour. Other people are frustrated by them, but we find riddles intriguing.'

The Philosophers of Arithmea: 'They are so very clever but so very joyless! If life is not a celebration, then what is the point of fighting for it?'

The Planespiders: 'Um… they are pretty to look at?'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'They are wonderful, beautiful people. When this has all blown over, we must visit their Summerlands and sing songs of our deeds together.'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'You think they would know how to enjoy themselves, with their mushroom wine and smoking herbs, but they are all so filled with angst! We are trying to save the multiverse and they are sitting on their backsides writing poetry!'

The Sylvan Covenant

The group before you is mostly made up of elves dressed in robes of green and gold or leather armour that looks as soft and comfortable as kidskin. Accompanying them are larger beings, some with the heads and claws of lions, some with wolf-like features. They move with grace and assurance and their eyes, though fierce, twinkle with merriment.

The Summerlands have no single ruler. The plane is a peaceful anarchy, with villages and farmsteads making their own laws and conducting their own business. Without protection, though, the place would be open to raiders. No centralised government means no organised army. The need for protection inspired several of the realm's denizens to commit to a voluntary defence force. Thus arose the Sylvan Covenant, a band of elves, fey and good outsiders sworn to protect the Summerlands.

Most of the time this means defending their home from the minions of Jasmeera's Court (see below) and from ravening outsiders who descend from other planes. Now, with the planequake threatening both sides of Ardentia, the Sylvan Covenant has accepted a temporary truce. For more details on Ardentia, see Vanguard.

Alignment: Chaotic Good/Neutral Good

Members: There are twenty members of the Sylvan Covenant present, not including Fangthane Vespian. Ten of these are elven rangers, four are elven druids, two are leonals and two are wolf-headed good outsiders. One of the leonals is Rhozauur, who the Player Characters may have met in The Beasts of Jasmal.

Agenda: The Sylvan Covenant genuinely wants to help. Its members hate the politics that have already grown up here between the factions and is profoundly grateful for comradeship and assistance given without strings attached. It will be very easy for the Player Characters to make friends among this faction, but just as easy for them to lose their trust if they give any sign at all of betrayal. The Sylvan Covenant has lived for many years with Jasmeera's machinations and is inclined to see her hand in everything. Its members may need regular reassurance that their friends are not spies or sleeper agents.

Typical Member of the Sylvan Covenant, Elf Rgr20: CR 20; Medium humanoid; HD 20d8-20; hp 70; Init +4; Spd 30 ft; AC 26, touch 14, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +20; Grp +23; Atk +28 melee (1d8+8/17-20, *+5 keen longsword*) or +28 ranged (1d8+7/x3, *+4 composite longbow of distant shot* (+4 Str bonus)); Full Atk +28/+23/+18/+13 melee (1d8+8/17-20, *+5 keen longsword*) or +28/+23/+18/+13 ranged (1d8+7/x3, *+4 composite longbow of distant shot* (+4 Str bonus)) or +26/+26/+21/+17/+11 ranged (1d8+7/x3, *+4 composite longbow of distant shot* (+4 Str bonus)); SA favoured enemies, spells; SQ camouflage, elf traits, evasion, hide in plain sight, swift tracker, woodland stride; AL CG; SV: Fort +11, Ref +16, Will +8; Str 16, Dex 18, Con 8, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Handle Animal +24, Hide +16, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +16, Move Silently +16, Ride +17, Search +10, Spot +15, Survival +25; Dodge, Endurance[B], Improved Precise Shot[B], Manyshot[B], Mobility, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot[B], Ride-By Attack, Shot on the Run, Track[B].

Spells Prepared (4/4/3/3, save DC 12 + spell level): 1st – *alarm, pass without trace, resist energy* (2); 2nd – *barkskin, cat's grace* (2), *speak with plants;* 3rd – *cure moderate wounds* (2), *tree shape;* 4th – *commune with nature, cure serious wounds* (2).

Manyshot: The covenanter's Manyshot feat allows him to fire multiple arrows at a single target within 30 feet, as a standard action. For convenience, the number of extra arrows allowed and accompanying attack roll penalty is given here: 2 arrows: –4; 3 arrows: –6; 4 arrows: –8. Damage reduction and other resistances apply separately against each arrow fired. If a critical hit is scored, only the first arrow fired deals critical damage; all others deal regular damage.

Favoured Enemies and Associated Bonus: Elves +6; Outsiders (evil) +4; Undead +4; Fey +4; Dragons +2.

Equipment & Treasure: +8 elven chain shirt, +5 keen longsword, +4 composite longbow of distant shot

Animal Companion, Light warhorse: CR –; Large animal; HD 9d8+27; hp 67; Init +3; Spd 60 ft. (12 squares); AC 22, touch 12, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +6; Grp +14; Atk +10 melee (1d4+4, hoof); Full Atk +10 melee (1d4+4, 2 hooves) and +7 melee (1d3+2, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SQ evasion, low-light vision, link, scent, share spells; AL N; SV: Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +4; Str 19, Dex 16, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 6.

Skills & Feats: Listen +7, Spot +7; Dodge, Endurance, Run, Weapon Focus (hoof)

Fangthane Vespian

The leader of the Sylvan Covenant is Vespian, current Fangthane of the Bosken Woods; 'Fangthane' is a title that means 'friend and protector of wild things'. Vespian is a black-haired elf with spiral tattoos on his cheeks, a crown of thorns that denotes his office and sends a continual trickle of blood down from his brow (the *crown of the fangthane*, for which see below) and a mass of scars on his back.

These scars date from a time when Jasmeera captured and tortured him, trying to persuade the Covenant to release certain 'political prisoners' (creatures of the Shadowlands) who had been imprisoned in the Summerlands. Vespian did not break under the torture and managed to escape, becoming the only person ever to break out of the Chateau of Lambent Flames.

Fangthane Vespian, Male Elf Drd26: CR 26; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 26d8+26; hp 143; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 32, touch 13, flat-footed 29; Base Atk +18; Grp +19; Atk +27 melee (1d6+9, *+8 quarterstaff of brilliant energy*) or +24 ranged (1d4+4 plus 3d6 sonic, *+3 sling of sonic blast*); Full Atk +27/+22/+17 melee (1d6+9, *+8 quarterstaff of brilliant energy*) or +24/+19/+14 ranged (1d4+4 plus 3d6 sonic, *+3 sling of sonic blast*); SA wild shape, spells; SQ a thousand faces, elf traits, resist nature's lure, trackless step, venom immunity, wild empathy, woodland stride; AL NG; SV Fort +16, Ref +12, Will +20; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 21, Cha 8.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +10, Diplomacy +9, Handle Animal +24, Heal +14, Knowledge (nature) +26, Listen +20, Spot +20, Survival +14; Dodge, Great Wisdom, Mobility, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Multispell, Natural Spell, Plant Wild Shape, Quicken Spell, Track.

Wild Shape (Su): Vespian may assume animal or plant form (up to Huge size) seven times per day and elemental form (up to Huge size) three times per day. He retains the ability to cast spells in these forms, along with the armour and enhancement bonuses from his *+7 wild leather armour* and the *crown of the fangthane*.

Spells prepared (6/7/6/6/6/6/4/4/4/4, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th *– cure minor wounds, detect magic, detect poison, read magic, resistance* (2)*;* 1st *– charm animal, endure elements, entangle, longstrider, obscuring mist, produce flame, speak with animals;* 2nd *– bear's endurance, bull's strength, flaming sphere, heat metal, lesser restoration, owl's wisdom;* 3rd *– call lightning, dominate animal, quench, remove disease, sleet storm, water breathing;* 4th *– blight, command plants, dispel magic, flame strike, rusting grasp, scrying;* 5th *– animal growth, call lightning storm, commune with nature, cure critical wounds, hallow, wall of thorns;* 6th *– antilife shell, find the path, greater dispel magic, ironwood;* 7th *– creeping doom, fire storm, flame strike* (maximised), *true seeing;* 8th *– call lightning storm* (maximised), *dispel magic* (quickened), *earthquake, sunburst;* 9th *– antipathy, elemental swarm, shambler, storm of vengeance*.

Equipment & Treasure: +8 quarterstaff of brilliant energy, +7 wild leather armour, +3 sling of sonic blast, crown of the fangthane, sling bullets (10).

Crown of the Fangthane

This woven crown of briars was woven in the years when Ardentia was young. It is simple and barbaric-looking and bristles with bloodstained thorns.

The crown confers a potent protection upon the wearer, granting a +10 natural armour bonus to Armour Class, along with resistance to fire 30, resistance to cold 30 and resistance to electricity 30. These bonuses are *wild*, meaning that the bearer continues to benefit from them when in *wild shape*.

The crown's powers are not without cost. The sharp thorns dig into the flesh, causing continual bleeding – a reminder that the duty is a stern one and not a privilege. This deals ten points of damage which may not be healed by any means so long as the crown is worn. A *wish* or *miracle* can cure the damage immediately after the crown is taken off, and the wounds can be healed by normal means 1d4+1 days after it is removed.

Only the lawfully designated Fangthane of the woods may handle the crown. Any other person is dealt 10d6 points of damage upon touching it – a Fortitude save (DC 30) is allowed for half damage – and gains two negative levels if he puts it on. These negative levels never result in actual level loss and are removed if the crown is taken off.

Attitudes towards Other Factions

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'Things are going to turn ugly between us very quickly. There is nobody keeping them in check. They are a worse danger than Bodiless Ao. Their lusts and brutality could compromise this Assembly much more fatally than his calculated malice.'

Bodiless Ao: 'Who is he? Where does he come from? Everyone is so busy being terrified of him that they forget to think and ask questions. We could all do with knowing a little more about our so-called ally and that poor child he has dominated.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'They seem a little out of their depth. They think they are experts, but this situation is new to them. We like them, but we would not rely on their advice.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'They are the enemy. They have always been the enemy. Raid upon raid, war upon war, the bitterness runs too deep to burn out. This truce only holds while we face a common threat. We will keep them where we can see them. The slightest suggestion of treachery and we will tear their throats out, and the alliance be damned.'

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'We are sorry for their loss, but it does not give them the right to give us orders. They fear us, and wish to keep us in check. They do not understand that we wish only to defend ourselves. If they chafe us too much, we will break free.'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'They are frustrating, but we enjoy watching other people puzzling over them. They ought to remind the smug Philosophers that they do not have an answer for everything.'

The Philosophers of Arithmea: 'We know that coming to this plane was their idea, but we do not like the way they have assumed control. Now that the Huntsmen have fallen into step as their muscle, how long can it be before they start instituting laws and penalties? We understand the need to work together in the face of a common enemy, but we will *not* be ruled by anyone.'

The Planespiders: 'We cannot even begin to imagine the tedium of their lives. Keeping the universe darned like a sock! Their frantic need to mend everything is… troubling. Sometimes there *needs* to be damage and disorder.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'Beauty such as this is what we are fighting to preserve. We have made no promise to defend them, but we will do so nonetheless, because they are good at heart. Unlike us, they are not tested in battle. We can only hope they do not turn tail and flee when the fighting begins.'

The Threnody in Velvet: 'They are *seriously* overcompensating for something. What on Ardentia could they be so guilty

about? They are right to celebrate on the brink of destruction, for this is the act of someone who is truly alive, but we do not understand their angst.'

The Threnody in Velvet

The drow here seem unable to look at you without guilt, as if the deeds of their kinsmen have somehow tainted them. These are not the drow you are used to. Their hair is long and matted into dreadlocks, their clothing is loose and colourful and there is not a spider motif anywhere in sight. Most of them carry flasks of wine or a smoking apparatus made from coloured glass bulbs and silver tubes.

As detailed elsewhere, the members of the Threnody represent a break from traditional drow values. They are obsessed with experiencing freedom, defying authority and living life to the full. At the same time, their dark heritage weighs heavily upon them. They channel this into their art, reciting long poems about how desolate they feel and how fogged their destiny is (to the drow, who have darkvision, 'dark' does not have the same connotations as it does for humans. They tend to use 'fog' instead, since it obscures their vision, so where a human poet would speak of 'the darkness in my soul', a drow poet would speak of 'the fog' or 'the smoke' in his). After a bout of mutual life-affirmation through drumming, ritual mourning and deliberately random behaviour, they often cut themselves or become drunk.

Unlike regular drow, Threnody members do not use poison on their weapons. This is both a matter of principle and a consequence of their being cut off from the supply of drow poison. Their default alignment is chaotic neutral rather than lawful evil. While they retain their drow traits and weapon proficiencies, they use more ordinary weapons when they can.

Note: The Threnody is here on the Skull either because of the Player Characters or in spite of them. If he is present, Mhorannan tries to persuade the Player Characters to let the Threnody know about the Assembly, after which the Threnody can travel to the Skull and set up camp. If Player Characters refuse, he passes the message back to them anyway, convinced that they *have* to be here. If Mhorannan is not present at all, the Threnody learns about the Skull through its own researches and is there before the Player Characters arrive. The Games Master can drop hints that in doing so, the Threnody may have led the other drow here.

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Agenda: The Threnody likes to think that it has a vital part to play in the coming struggle, because its members believe that their former kinsmen are somehow responsible for the planequake. While this is true, nobody has any reason to believe it yet (save, perhaps, the Player Characters) and the Threnody's claims come across as self-aggrandisement.

All Threnody members have a strong wish to prove themselves useful. Thus they volunteer for dangerous tasks, rush headlong into danger and offer to do any errands the Player Characters might want done. The Player Characters are their main concern, so they try to stay near them.

Members: There are twenty members of the Threnody present. This is not the whole Threnody, just the group that was chosen to represent it at the Skull. The members of the Threnody are less powerful than the others here, as they are young and few of them have gained more than 16 levels of experience. The priestesses of the Threnody usually worship Arosi, the goddess of intoxication, instead of She or Arkady.

Typical Threnody Member, Drow Sor14: CR 15; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 14d4; hp 35; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +7; Grp +7; Atk +7 melee (1d6, quarterstaff) or +9 ranged (1d10/19–20, heavy crossbow); Full Atk +7/+2 melee (1d6, quarterstaff) or +9 ranged (1d10/19–20, heavy crossbow); SA spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 25; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +9; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 18.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +20, Craft (carving) +20, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Perform (recite) +15, Spellcraft

+22; Dodge, Improved Counterspell, Maximise Spell, Skill Focus (Concentration), Skill Focus (Perform (recite)).

Spells known (6/7/7/7/7/6/5/3, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th *– arcane mark, detect magic, flare, ghost sound, mage hand, message, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st *– disguise self, mage armour, magic missile, shield, true strike;* 2nd *– alter self, detect thoughts, scorching ray, web, whispering wind;* 3rd *– dispel magic, displacement, fireball, lightning bolt;* 4th *– black tentacles, confusion, solid fog, stoneskin;* 5th *– mage's private sanctum, teleport, transmute rock to mud;* 6th *– repulsion, transformation;* 7th *– mage's sword.*

Equipment & Treasure: Colourful clothing, crossbow bolts (10), dagger, flask of wine, heavy crossbow, quarterstaff, tizla leaves, tizla pipe.

Tarzi An'Drasta

Tarzi is the current leader of the Threnody. The group argued for several weeks about whether or not to have a leader, finally settling on Tarzi because he seemed to get things done. A genius with arcane magic and a former high commander in the armies of the Ennead, Tarzi is a muscular drow who likes to wear open velvet waistcoats, loose breeches and nothing else. His white dreadlocks hang down to the small of his back. His cousin, Mhorannan, has already attempted to make contact with the Player Characters.

To the families of the Ennead, Tarzi is the most despised drow of all time, more so even than the wretched exiles of House Arakh. They intend to hunt him down and kill him. Their efforts may well lead them straight to the Skull, which is another reason Tarzi is glad to be among so many different factions; surely a band of murderous drow will not last long against Hygrave and his huntsmen, not to mention Myonatix or the leonal allies of the Sylvan Covenant.

Tarzi is more focused and articulate than most of the Threnody and, though he would not say so openly, is growing impatient with their self-indulgent ways. He understands their need to seek catharsis – they have a heavy legacy of evil to throw off – but wants most of all to move on and leave the past behind.

Tarzi An'Drasta, Male Drow Wiz17/Acm1: CR 19; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 17d4 plus 1d4; hp 45; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +8; Grp +7; Atk +10 melee (1d6+2/19–20, *+3 rapier*) or +14 ranged (1d10+3/19–20, *+3 heavy crossbow*); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d6+2/19–20, *+3 rapier*) or +14 ranged (1d10+3/19–20, *+3 heavy crossbow*); SA arcane fire, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 29; AL CN; SV Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +13; Str 8, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 19, Wis 12, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Appraise +7, Concentration +21, Craft (sculpture) +22, Decipher Script +13, Knowledge (arcana) +22, Knowledge (history) +13, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +13, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Listen +3, Search +6, Spellcraft +22, Spot +3; Augmented Summoning, Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item[B], Greater Spell Penetration, Maximise Spell[B], Scribe Scroll[B], Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Conjuration), Spell Focus (Evocation), Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Penetration.

Arcane Fire (Su): Tarzi can change arcane spell energy into arcane fire, manifesting it as a bolt of raw magical energy. The bolt is a ranged touch attack with long range (440 feet) that deals 1d6 points of damage plus 1d6 points of damage per level of the spell used to create the effect.

Spells prepared (4/5/5/5/5/4/4/3/3/2, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th *– detect magic, message, read magic, resistance;* 1st *– charm person, magic missile, shield, true strike* (2)*;* 2nd *– acid arrow, cat's grace, fox's cunning, mirror image, web;* 3rd *– blink, dispel magic, fireball, sleet storm, slow;* 4th *– black tentacles, greater invisibility, resilient sphere, stoneskin, wall of fire;* 5th *– transmute rock to mud, summon monster V, wall of force, waves of fatigue;* 6th *– globe of invulnerability, greater dispel magic, mislead, repulsion;* 7th *– forcecage, mass hold person, project image*; 8th *– iron body, maze, summon monster VIII;* 9th – gate, *time stop.*

Equipment & Treasure: +3 heavy crossbow, +3 rapier, crossbow bolts (10).

Attitudes towards Other Factions

The Aerial Demons of Hecke: 'We are amazed that they even care about the coming apocalypse. To listen to them, one would think it was all nihilism, futility and having a good time while we still can. Well, if our efforts to save the multiverse are in vain, at least we shall have a legendary party before the end of the worlds.'

Bodiless Ao: 'We have spent too many years close to devious evil not to recognise it when we see it. Mark our words, the demilich intends to betray all of us. He knows more about this destruction than he is willing to admit.'

The Conclave of Ashfar: 'How strange that we should now be the allies of those who opposed our people for so long. We cannot help but hate them a little.'

The Court of Jasmeera: 'Corrupt and decadent they may be, but they treat us with respect. Would that the other factions did so. They are confident, powerful and unafraid. They may be our best hope.'

Hygrave's Huntsmen: 'They are too devoted to their duty. We have seen thousands of years of such blind obedience. Without a master to serve, they are lost. They remind us too much of what we used to be.'

The Legion of the Realm Imponderable: 'How can we trust them, when they show so little of what they are? Nobody here

has a kind word to say about them, nor do they seem to care. If they do not contribute, and soon, then we shall urge the others to cast them out.'

The Philosophers of Arithmea: 'They are learned men with a reputation for tolerance. Surely they will understand that our motives are sincere and accept us as members of the Assembly.'

The Planespiders: 'Unthinking automatons with nothing to contribute. This damage is far beyond anything they can repair. They are trying to bail a sinking ship with thimbles! Besides, we have had quite enough of spiders and strict rules. They remind us of a past we would rather forget.'

The Retinue of Lady Myonatix: 'She is a simpering twit and that dragon's shimmer is like having a migraine. All that happy rainbow energy makes us want to vomit. If we are attacked here, then they had better pull their weight, or they will slow everyone else down.'

The Sylvan Covenant: 'They loathe us and we are not surprised. We expected to encounter prejudice. Well, if they do not listen to what we have to say, it is their loss.'

Plot Event: The Assembly

The event begins when Lord Fnut calls the assembled factions to order. The Games Master can allow a little time for the Player Characters to meet and socialise with the other groups first but not too much, as there is urgent business to attend to. Fnut opens the meeting with a welcome:

'Sentient creatures of many planes, voyagers, thinkers and ponderers, we bid you all welcome to this place of sanctuary and peace. The crisis we all face today needs no complicated speeches to describe. The worlds we inhabit are being destroyed. Their destruction leaves holes in the universe, which is beginning to cave in, sending shockwaves through the neighbouring planes. The questions we must answer here today are: Who is doing this? Why are they doing it? How can we stop them?

'With that in mind, we turn to the first order of business.'

Running the Meeting: The first Assembly is a freeform roleplaying event with no script, guided entirely by the factions' agendas, the information available and the Player Characters' own contributions. The Games Master can either play all the parts himself and let the Player Characters chime in when they have something to say, or he can summarise the main points and ask the Player Characters if they want to say anything.

Fnut has an agenda prepared, with three points for discussion. These are outlined below, along with likely contributions from the various groups, summarised for the sake of space. Bear in mind that these are rough guidelines around which to improvise, not scripts!

All further meetings of the Assembly will follow this pattern of 'Security, Theories, Action' so that the Player Characters can get used to it and make contributions when appropriate.

Point One: Security

Lord Fnut: Are we secure in this current location?

Hygrave: We can watch above, for the Skull is open, but as yet we know nothing of what lies beneath.

Bodiless Ao: When I created the dwellings, I sensed many presences below us. I'm one thousand and ninety-eight, you know.

Lady Myonatix: I am not calling you a liar, but maybe somebody should check that before we rush off.

Jasmeera: We, too, have detected the presence of living creatures. Bodiless Ao has no reason to lie.

Lady Myonatix: Well, it is nice to see that people are beginning to form new friendships.

Lord Fnut: Order, please.

Threnody: We are used to navigating tunnels. We could investigate.

Lord Fnut: I call for volunteers to explore the hollow spaces within the Skull and make sure there are no lingering threats.

If the Player Characters do not volunteer, some members of the Threnody in Velvet and the Sylvan Covenant do so. They return and ask the Player Characters for help as soon as they run into trouble.

Point Two: Theories

Lord Fnut: Does anyone have any theories at this stage as to what could be doing this?

Aerial Demons: Who cares? Wait around long enough and we will find out.

Threnody: Our former kinsmen serve a force of primal void called the Dark. We think that it is responsible.

Bodiless Ao: I believe it to be the act of a mad god. I knew a mad god once. He assumed the form of a great banana and drove through the sky in a chariot pulled by flaming melons.

Jasmeera: Do we even know that it is deliberate? It could be random.

Planespiders: We have discerned signs of intentional damage. Insufficient data as yet.

Lord Fnut: As well as the *who*, we must consider the *how*. We know of no power that can annihilate an entire plane. Can any here present say that they have heard of such a power?

Bodiless Ao: Certain artefacts are supposed to have near-limitless powers of destruction. I have heard tell of the Ebon Ring of the Carnifex, which is said to have reduced the world of Emacia to dust. Perhaps this is for the best. It was a silly world.

Jasmeera: As have I. In addition, when I was young, I heard legends of the Banestaff, which the artificer Zaun wielded against his people's gods. He is supposed to have shattered their reality by the power of the Banestaff.

Realm Imponderable: The Eye of Igrath. Its opening draws all existent things down into chaos.

Lord Fnut: It seems we have no shortage of plane-destroying powers. I propose that we investigate these legends and find out what has become of the items in question. *(Heartily agreed.)*

Sylvan Covenant: Something of this scale must have been foreseen. Have we no prophecies to consult?

Lord Fnut: I move that all those here present investigate and bring to the Assembly any prophecies of apocalypse that may apply to our situation, each from his own world. *(Agreed.)*

Point Three: Action

Lord Fnut: What worthwhile action can we take at this stage?

Lady Myonatix: We should be saving people! Whole worlds could be falling apart right now!

Jasmeera: We could waste our time saving people who will then perish in a far greater catastrophe which we did nothing to prevent. That would accomplish nothing. We need more information.

Threnody or Conclave: Let us try to think like the enemy. If we were going to cause as much damage as possible, which planes would we destroy?

Sylvan Covenant: We approve of this line of thought. Once we know where the enemy may strike, we can await him and catch him in the act.

Bodiless Ao: A dangerous undertaking. One might arrive at a doomed plane at the very moment of its destruction. One might be in the middle of a picnic.

Jasmeera: Nor is there any guarantee that one could locate the malefactor, even if one had guessed correctly. Planes tend to be *large*, as we all know.

Planespiders: Negative. Those planes that have been annihilated were not large. They accommodated but one world.

Lord Fnut: I propose the immediate preparation of a list of likely target planes, to which we shall send investigation parties who shall report back. *(Agreed.)*

Why are there no archfiends or even deities present here?

The Player Characters may find it strange that an event as wide-reaching as the planequake has not brought more powerful entities such as gods or infernals to the Skull to join the gathering. Surely if the survival of the whole multiverse is at stake, such beings will not sit back and watch while lesser creatures do all the work?

Lord Fnut has this explanation:

'It seems that the planequake has not reached to the heights of Heaven or the depths of Hell. This might be an argument for shifting our base of operations to either of those places, were it not for the difficulty of reaching other planes from anywhere else but here. I can only assume that the supreme powers of creation do not consider the planequake a threat to them, or that perhaps they do not wish to become involved in case it becomes a threat.

'One must remember that any members of the Heavenly Host and of the legions of Hell who have chosen to join us are doing so without the express approval of their superiors. It would never do for the Princes of Evil to approach the Solars for help, nor would the reverse be thinkable! It is enough that we have representatives from good and evil planes present, working for a common cause.'

Legends of Nuith

As the Player Characters interact with the other factions, they learn some new information about the power guiding them towards their destinies. Legends common to all the interplanar cultures describe the Astral Plane as the body of a star goddess who set herself between the outer darkness and the world of men. This is the same goddess that the Starborn know as Nuith, the protector of Ashfar.

The full nature of the Starborn's mysterious patron is now revealed. She is not just the starry sky, but an avatar of the Astral Plane, the space-like continuum that encircles all things. She divides the heavens and hells from the earth. Her ancient foe, the Dark, is assailing her once more.

Exploring the Skull

After the meeting concludes, the Player Characters are free to do as they like. No further 'hooks' are coming until the Assembly has decided which planes should be visited and checked for signs of the enemy. The Games Master may want to give the players prompts as to what they can do, since this situation is more open-ended than most.

- The Starborn have been assigned a dwelling; do they want to fortify it, place *alarm* spells or anything of that ilk? Is there any equipment or furniture they want to fetch from home?

- The Assembly has now broken up into sub-groups discussing the different points raised in the meeting. Hygrave's Huntsmen and the Sylvan Covenant are most concerned about security. The Philosophers, Bodiless Ao and Jasmeera's Court are talking about prophecies and the best way to find out which planes are vulnerable. The Aerial Demons and the Threnody are relaxing and trying to have a good time. The Player Characters can join any of these groups and get to know them a little better.

- There was mention earlier of life forms lurking within the bone of the Skull. Investigating these would be a good way to help and earn the gratitude of the assembled groups.

Detecting What Is Down There: The Player Characters may want to talk to Bodiless Ao or Jasmeera, as both mentioned 'sensing' many creatures beneath the area of the Skull where the factions are gathered. Both are quite willing to talk. They say only that there are multiple creatures of considerable power, seemingly dormant, directly beneath the bone dwellings at a depth of around one hundred feet.

If the Starborn use means such as Diplomacy to encourage the Non-Player Characters to open up a little more, they learn that there is no spell that can simply 'detect' life signs at this range. One has to send a magical sensor into the space to be searched. Both Bodiless Ao and Jasmeera have used *arcane eye* to explore the tunnels and have seen the same thing: a cavern in which motionless creatures huddle, each around the size of a man. The creatures are winged, clawed and seem to be made from yellowish stone, blending into the bone behind them. Ao and Jasmeera saw further tunnels beyond the cavern but were able to probe no further, as some form of magical warding prevented it.

Finding a Way In: There are several crevices in the bone, located at the edge of the dwelling cluster (see map), that offer ways into the tunnels. These crevices are all narrow, ranging in width from one inch to one foot across. Player Characters can hack their way in (which will take time), shrink themselves or call upon Bodiless Ao to use his *bone shape* spell and widen the entrance.

The tunnels seem oddly smooth, as if they were bored directly through the bone. A Heal check (DC 20) or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 20) reveals that there should not be any tunnels here in an ordinary human skull; whether their presence is because the skull belonged to a god or because some creature has *made* them is unclear. The texture of the walls is identical to that of the bone dwellings made by Bodiless Ao. Perhaps this is all his work and he is leading the Player Characters into an elaborate trap!

The Cavern of the Watchers

As the Player Characters approach within listening range of the cavern they hear chanting:

From the end of the corridor comes a soft purring noise, or perhaps it is a growl. It sounds like the word 'Thren' repeated over and over again in a multitude of low, gravelly voices.

Finally they reach the cavern itself:

This hollow cavern within the bone is thrumming with the repeated chant of the single word 'Thren'. The noise comes from the stone creatures perched above and around you on ridges of bone extruded from the wall. There are four of them that you can see, rough-skinned beasts with wings, claws and horns.

On the cavern's floor is a raised circular dais marked with hieroglyphs. The whole array has been fashioned from the bone but it does not seem to have been carved.

The watchers are paragon gargoyles, here to defend the sanctum of Thren (see below) against intrusion. Unlike normal gargoyles, they are specially bred by magic and are fanatically loyal to their master, whom they believe is still alive.

Paragon Gargoyles (4): CR 19; Medium monstrous humanoid (earth); HD 4d8+95; hp 127; Init +9; Spd 120 ft., fly 180 ft. (average); AC 50, touch 45, flat-footed 39; Base Atk +4; Grp +14; Atk +39 melee (1d4+30, claw); Full Atk +39 melee (1d4+30, 2 claws) and +37 melee (1d6+25, bite) and +37 melee (1d6+25, gore); SA spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10/epic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 20, freeze, resistance to cold 10, resistance to fire 10, spell resistance 44; AL CE; SV Fort +22, Ref +23, Will +22; Str 30, Dex 29, Con 33, Int 21, Wis 26, Cha 22.

Skills & Feats: Hide +26, Listen +15, Move Silently +26, Search +22, Spot +25, Tumble +26; Flyby Attack[B], Multiattack, Toughness.

Spell-Like Abilities: 3/day – *greater dispel magic*, *haste*, *see invisibility.* Caster level 15th.

The dais is actually a three-foot-thick bone cap fused to the surrounding bone by Thren's magic. It is trapped with a specially prepared epic magical trap:

Hellball Trap: CR 18; Search DC 35, Disable Device DC 35; effect 10d6 each of acid, fire, electrical and sonic damage dealt to all targets within a 40-ft.-radius spread; Reflex save (DC 28) for half damage.

The Sanctum of Thren

Beneath the bone lid is a winding staircase of moulded bone threading through the air in a crazy zig-zag down to the floor below. The room beneath is strikingly different from what you have seen so far. Instead of another cavern shaped from the bone, it is a library panelled with wood! Hundreds of thick leatherbound tomes line the walls on freestanding bookshelves.

In the west wall a cosy fire burns in a stone fireplace, with a fur rug in front of it. Warming his feet in front of this fire is a young man in a kimono. A white staff tipped with the skull of some feline creature lies by his side.

This is not an illusion. When he created this place, Thren used *major creation* to furnish his retreat and brought his books from his home on the plane of Gashlycrake. The fire is magical but still warm.

Although he pretends to be Thren, the man is actually a duplicate of the original Thren birthed from the mothering mass in the Room of Creations (see page 75). He plays the part of a curmudgeonly scholar, irate that the Player Characters have destroyed his guardians and possibly wrecked part of his home to reach him. He insists that he is merely a scholar and practitioner of magic who has come here to seek seclusion – 'though now it seems that seclusion is denied to me!' – and to tap the secrets of the Skull, if there are secrets to be found.

If the duplicate thinks that he can handle the Player Characters alone, he telepathically notifies the mothering mass to send out swarms of needlemites which attack the group, steal a little of their blood and flee. If not, he waits until they have left, then sends the needlemites to assault them on their way back up to the surface. If the Player Characters attack him, he flees to the mass.

The doorway to the Room of Creations has been hidden behind one of the bookshelves. A Search check (DC 20) in the proper area of the room is required to find it.

A search of the fake chimney above the fire, using another Search check (DC 20), discovers the dry bones of the original Thren, stuffed up there to keep them out of the way.

Duplicate of Thren: CR 16; Medium outsider (extraplanar); HD 1d8+5; hp 9; Init +6; Spd 60 ft.; AC 41, touch 16, flat-footed 35; Base Atk +1; Grp +11; Atk +26 melee (2d8+10, tentacle rake); Full Atk +26 melee (2d8+10, 2 tentacle rakes); SA improved grab, rotting constriction, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 5/epic, resistance to acid 15 and electrical 15, semblance, spell resistance 5, telepathy; AL CN; SV Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +9; Str 30, Dex 22, Con 20, Int 20, Wis 25, Cha 14.

Skills & Feats: Spot +9, Listen +10; Combat Expertise, Power Attack.

Note: For Special Attack descriptions see Appendix 3, Duplicate Entity.

Equipment & Treasure: The duplicate has Thren's *staff of necromancy*, which it carries but does not use, since it is only a replica and does not have Thren's spellcasting abilities.

The Room of Research

This long room seems to be a combination of a museum and a laboratory. Its occupant seems to have been obsessed with dead bodies. You are momentarily unsure whether the hundreds of fragments of dead things here are exhibits, trophies or specimens.

A large workbench to one side is covered with scattered, dusty papers. Shelves upon the walls hold green glass jars in which float extracted organs, some instantly and unpleasantly recognisable, others wholly alien to you. A glass case holds the stuffed body of a medusa, her lethal eyes replaced with bulging glass orbs. A tank beside it is filled with murky liquid in which floats a single gigantic eyeball.

At the far end of the room, a tablet of black slate sits on a pedestal of bone grown from the floor. Runes are graven deeply into its surface.

This is where Thren attempted to pry into the secrets of creating new life. A search of the desk via a Search check (DC 25) reveals three *scrolls of clone* (caster level 26th) stashed in a secret compartment at the back of one of the drawers.

The Tablet: The bone pedestal is trapped. Any creature who approaches closer than ten feet without making the appropriate gestures with Thren's *staff of necromancy* – it must be swept down, then from left to right, then in a circle – triggers the trap. When it is triggered, a *resilient sphere* encloses the entire marked area and an *acidic globe* (see below) simultaneously fills the enclosed space, targeted on the pedestal. Creatures can attempt to dispel the *resilient sphere* by the usual means, freeing anyone trapped inside, but this does not dispel the *acidic globe.*

***Resilient Sphere/Acidic Globe* Trap:** CR 18; Search DC 35, Disable Device DC 35; effect *resilient sphere* imprisons and *acidic globe* deals 16d6 acid damage per round; Reflex save (DC 22) to avoid sphere and second Reflex save (DC 28) each round for half acid damage.

The black slate tablet contains the epic spell *peripety*, recorded by Thren in case he needed to pass it on to a successfully created duplicate of himself.

Acidic Globe

Evocation [Acid]
Spellcraft DC: 19
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: 300 ft.
Area: A 10 ft. radius emanation
Duration: 20 hours
Saving Throw: Reflex half
Spell Resistance: Yes
To Develop: 648,000 gp; 13 days; 25,920 XP. Seed: *energy* (DC 19). Factors: additional 16d6 damage (DC +30)

This spell causes a creature or object to emit a continuous fountain of magical acid, which sprays out in a spherical emanation to a radius of ten feet. The acid deals 18d6 points of damage per round against unprotected creatures.

The Room of the Necrophone

You are on the edge of a deep shaft that sinks down many hundreds of feet into the depths of the Skull. Grafted onto the side of the shaft, twenty feet down from your location, is a hoop of mithral that encircles the shaft. The hoop is about two inches thick and rather resembles the metal bands that enclose a barrel. Across the ring are stretched hundreds of tight, gleaming wires, as if to slice any creature that descends through the shaft into ribbons. A message of some sort, too faint to read from here, is inscribed into the bone beneath the ring.

This is not a trap, though it may be mistaken for one. This was Thren's attempt to give Paithah a voice. The wires are vocal chords; the mithral ring is a device Thren called a necrophone. The message requires a Decipher Script check (DC 30) to be made sense of. It reads 'By the authority of the living, let the dead be given voice'.

A character can activate the necrophone by channelling divine energy into the surrounding bone (this uses up a turn or rebuke undead attempt) or by casting *create undead* into the bone. Either method awakens a fragment of the dead god's soul for one minute, during which time the Player Characters can ask what questions of Paithah they may wish. So long as they are respectful and humble, Paithah answers them. The dead god can tell his life story (see page 42) and also knows the following:

- The one who did this was Thren, a great necromancer, now himself among the dead.
- Thren sought the secret of creating life from dead matter.
- There is a powerful source of new life close by (the mothering mass).
- The Skull has felt the shockwaves from the planequake. With the remnants of its godlike intellect, it senses that three nearby planes are severely weakened and are nearing collapse. These are Blue Lethary, Muzziomone and the Firefalls of Torrendo.
- As well as creating the necrophone, Thren attempted to commune directly with the Skull, temporarily merging his soul with it. This was the most hazardous of necromantic rituals, as he risked losing his life force forever and being dragged down into the dead bone beyond all hope of retrieval. The spell he was developing to achieve this was never completed. Had he succeeded, he would have been able to utilise the memories of a deity.

The Room of Creations

This hidden chamber is huge and echoing. It is a great dome hollowed out of the bone, with a pentacle of immense proportions painted on the floor in luminous paint that glows a faint green. It looks like the arrangement for the summoning and binding of some gigantic archdevil or, possibly, a minor deity.

What pulses and bubbles there now is no deity, unless there are deities of the primordial slime. It is as pink as sliced tissue and has the size and heft of an elephant. White fluid dribbles down its sides and a sickly sweet smell comes from it.

The creature in the midst of the chamber is a mothering mass (see Appendix 3: New Monsters). If the Player Characters take it by surprise, it will not have prepared any additional duplicate creatures. If it has had warning that they are coming, it will have as many duplicates as it can produce waiting to defend it.

The mothering mass does not want to fight. It is much more interested in learning about the gathering above and steadily infiltrating it with its duplicate creatures.

The Room of Merging

This simple room gives you an uncomfortable feeling, as if something profoundly wrong and irreversible has happened here. The room contains very little. There is only a book and a pen on a table and, at the side of these, a depression in the bone floor. The depression is in the shape of a human body with arms and legs outstretched. It looks like a grave dug for someone.

Examination of the book shows it to be another of Thren's projects. It is so cryptically written that a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 30) is needed to get any sense out of it. A successful check reveals that this chamber was where Thren intended to merge his life force with the Skull, taking on what remained of the dead god's attributes and gaining the use of his powers.

The book contains a partially completed epic spell, *soulmerge*. When cast, it would transfer the caster's soul temporarily to the

Skull, granting the caster all the knowledge and perception of a god. A Player Character may potentially complete the spell and utilise it. By drawing on Thren's notes, a character can reduce the time required to develop the spell by three days.

Soulmerge

Necromancy
Contact, Compel
Spellcraft DC: 60
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch
Target: One dead creature
Duration: Continuous until dispelled
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No
To Develop: 540,000 gp, 11 days, 21,600 xp. Seeds: *contact, compel;* contact regardless of language (+4 DC), increase duration to permanent (x5 DC), caster helpless while spell ongoing (ad hoc -130 DC), target must be dead (ad hoc –40 DC)

The caster touches any dead creature or the remains thereof. His mind passes into those remains and magically stimulates the creature's spiritual residue to yield up information. The creature may have been dead for any amount of time. The caster extracts as much information from the creature's remains as he desires. Even if the creature's soul has passed on to a new body and is now 'alive' again, the creature is unable to prevent the extraction of the information. Extracting information takes place at a rate equivalent to normal conversation, as if the caster and the creature were holding discourse.

Ideally, magicians might use this epic spell when *speak with dead* is unfeasible, usually because only a tiny fragment of the dead creature remains. As with *speak with dead*, the caster does not address the dead creature's soul, only the imprinted knowledge stored in the remains.

While the spell lasts, the caster is helpless, as if asleep.

Information: Thren's Story

The Player Characters can gain access to this information by using *legend lore* or a similar spell on Thren's remains, casting *speak with dead*, talking to Paithah or though other similar methods.

The necromancer Thren was once an apprentice of Bodiless Ao, in the days when Ao was only a lich. He fled as soon as he realised that his own growing power would soon cause the lich to see him as a threat instead of a protégé.

Thren came to the Skull seventy years ago, hoping to unlock the secrets that might still linger in the bone. Thren was obsessed with life as much as with death, wishing to gain mastery over it and become the lord of his own creation. He reasoned that the skull of a creator god must still be redolent with creative power. The only question was how to extract it.

Thren decided to set up his research laboratory within the bone itself. As he had been driven from village after village in his earlier years for being a meddler with necromantic arts, he was paranoid about being found out, especially now that he was presumptuous enough to be digging into the secrets of a deity. Using *bone shape*, he created a space for himself within the lower bones of the Skull and assigned his paragon gargoyle minions to watch over the approaches. The paragon gargoyles were earlier creations, superb killers forged from the body matter of ordinary gargoyles, wholly obedient to Thren's will.

After many months of solitary research, during which time Thren's twisted intellect fed upon itself until the man was more than half mad, the study bore fruit. Thren was able to create a mighty epic spell drawing upon the secrets of divine creation he had extracted from the skull of dead Paithah. He would become the creator of a new race of perfect humans free from sentimentality, pity or guilt. His knowledge was not perfect, as he had not yet achieved his ambition of merging his own life force with the Skull and thus learning all it knew, but this did not dissuade him. He was too eager to begin.

When cast, the spell did bring forth new life, but it was not the paragon human race Thren had envisioned. It was a pulsing wad of wobbling flesh with an insatiable craving to be impregnated with new biological information so that it could give birth to its own new creatures. Thren had created a mothering mass. Appalled by what he had done, he staggered away from it.

The mass whipped out a tentacle and lashed Thren's face, drawing blood. The blood quickly vanished inside the horror and a bubbling, quaking process of accelerated gestation began. Thren watched, half in awe and half in disgust, as the mothering mass groaned and a perfect replica of Thren slithered wetly onto the floor.

Despite himself, Thren was pleased with this, as his ego was immense and the copy of him was perfect. Perhaps this creation of his was not so bad after all. This momentary relief gave way to fresh terror as the duplicate Thren yawned widely and its head fell open into two sections, revealing a cluster of wriggling tendrils like a handful of worms.

That was the end of it. Thren resolved to destroy his creation and began to cast a *hellball* spell. The mass read his thoughts and lashed out with its tentacles, while the duplicate bellowed and tore at its unwitting father. The two creatures tore Thren to pieces between them. The duplicate now wears his clothing and carries his magical equipment, though it cannot use his staff. Together the duplicate and the mothering mass wait for fresh life to come to the Skull of Paithah so that the mass can steal more biological data and make new creatures.

Vanguard

Summary: The sages and mystics from the different planes begin to share information, though nobody is yet sure quite whom to trust. It seems that some force is destroying whole planes and doing so in such a way that other planes are being brought out of alignment like the stones in a wall beginning to collapse.

The alliance of planar factions calling itself the Assembly assigns optional missions to the Player Characters in which they must investigate planes known to be at risk, in the hope of catching the enemy in the act.

Investigative Quests

The missions in this chapter and the next are optional but recommended. They are of two kinds: investigations of planes known to be in vulnerable positions and investigations of legendary artefacts that could possibly have the power to destroy a whole plane.

The freeform nature of the adventure means that there is no set way for the Starborn to be given the mission. The intent is what counts, namely to find out more about the threat that everyone faces. At this stage of the campaign, there are many more questions than answers and the action cannot follow a single linear thread.

To set up a quest, the Games Master must ensure that the players know that the destination exists and that investigating it is important. A highly independent, resourceful party will find out about vulnerable planes and deadly artefacts through their own research and will need very little guidance. Not all parties are this thorough, however, and Player Characters may often miss key information. In this event, the Non-Player Characters are there to provide plot hooks and guide the Player Characters into missions. Players who are used to being given missions by patrons can turn to the Conclave of Ashfar or the Philosophers of Arithmea for guidance. The Games Master can also use quest assignment as a way to involve the Player Characters more deeply in the political tensions between the factions.

For example, the mission to investigate the Firefalls of Torrendo can be something that the Player Characters decide to do on their own initiative, having learned from the Skull that the Firefalls are in a vulnerable position and likely to be attacked. If they did not learn this information, a Non-Player Character such as Lady Myonatix can ask them to investigate, as her divinations have revealed that the plane is under threat.

Why Us?

The Player Characters may, quite reasonably, wonder why they are the ones being sent off through the planes to face danger and possible annihilation while the other factions sit with their feet up back at the Skull. The 'out-of-character' answer is, of course, that they are *Player* Characters and as such get to go on adventures rather than doing research; but there is also an 'in-character' reason.

Firstly, the other factions are not idle. They too are investigating worlds where the adversary may strike, questing after legendary artefacts and so on. The Player Characters' adventures simply represent the work they have been asked to do, or the leads they discover and follow up. Some members of the other factions may even accompany the Player Characters on their quests.

Secondly, and more importantly, the Player Characters begin the story as the least distrusted of all the factions. All of the others are seen as too goody-goody (Myonatix), too lawful (Planespiders), too manipulative (Jasmeera) and so on. The Player Characters have no apparent agenda other than to do something about the problem. This makes them the ideal candidates for these missions.

Most important of all, unlike any other creatures, the Player Characters have the potential to come back from the dead. This is not an easy thing to keep secret; for game purposes, the Games Master should assume that the Philosophers of Arithmea have heard of the Starborn and their powers. All the members of all the other factions have only one life to lose (with the exception of Bodiless Ao and the Demons of Hecke, of course), whereas the Player Characters are less vulnerable to death's embrace.

The intent is to give the players plenty to do and to think about, creating the impression of a frenzied hubbub of speculation. So long as they are never at a loss for somewhere to go or something to investigate, they will keep themselves occupied without the Games Master having to hand them plot hooks.

Discovering Evidence

Each one of these adventures provides the opportunity for the Player Characters to find new evidence concerning the causes of the planequake.

The Player Characters must decide whether to share their information with the Assembly or just with one or two favoured factions. Presenting it to the whole Assembly scores them important points with the Philosophers and possibly improves relations with other factions. Every time the Player Characters present information to the Assembly after one of these side adventures, they may make a Diplomacy check at a +2 circumstance bonus to improve the Philosophers' attitude towards them (one character can take on the responsibility of the actual check but he can be aided by the other characters). They may also, if they choose, make new Diplomacy checks to improve their standing with other factions (as their willingness to share information makes them less disliked), though these checks cannot improve a faction's attitude beyond Indifferent.

Sharing evidence with just one faction, instead of presenting it to the whole group, is contrary to the whole spirit of the Assembly but is a good way to curry favour. Each time this is done, the Player Characters can make a new Diplomacy check at a +2 circumstance bonus to improve the faction's attitude towards them. These checks *can* improve the faction's attitude beyond Indifferent.

Any faction that discovers that the Player Characters have shared information with another faction without telling them about it automatically drops one place in the scale of relations. The Games Master should allow the other factions to make suitable Gather Information checks between adventures to find out what has gone on behind their backs.

Investigating the Endangered Planes

Where to Start: Ongoing investigations reveal three additional planes on the same cosmic 'fault line' as Arkossa and Sakurafu. These are Muzziomone, Blue Lethary and the Firefalls of Torrendo. They are not connected to one another but they are closely clustered, according to the arcane and mind-wrangling rules of planar geometry. If any one of these planes were to be destroyed, it would precipitate a planequake much worse than the last, as a group of linked planes would almost certainly give way and collapse together.

Fortunately for the Player Characters, each of these planes is relatively small, occupying no more than a three-hundred-mile globe. It should therefore be possible (if difficult) to investigate them and find out if there has been any sign of strange plane-destroying magic recently.

Blue Lethary

Blue Lethary is a private demiplane of luxury and indulgence, made up of a group of small islands in a tranquil ocean. It was discovered and maintained by a powerful guild of mercanes called the Koikannu Family. They run it as a retreat for the rich and famous of the various planes. The demiplane is a combination of a holiday beach, retirement home, bolt-hole, tax haven and vision of the afterlife. It was designed to be as comfortable and sensual a place as any rich merchant could wish.

Only the very wealthiest of traders can afford a key to a Blue Lethary seaside mansion. The Koikannu mercanes take security very seriously and keep powerful magical guards stationed at all the entrances.

Who Has Heard of It: Lady Myonatix spent some time at Blue Lethary as the guest of her lover of the time, a Koikannu mercane named Tozen-Delph. She remembers it as 'a

wonderfully peaceful place, all sea and golden sand.' Jasmeera has heard of Blue Lethary and knows its purpose but has never been there, as it does not appeal to her wintry nature. Bodiless Ao claims that he once spent a lovely summer there being polished by beautiful women, but he is of course lying.

How to Get There: The conventional way to access Blue Lethary is to make contact with the Koikannu mercanes and express an interest in buying or renting a plot there. That entitles one to a planar key which allows access to the demiplane from its main gate in the Astral Plane. For a further charge, the mercanes will construct a direct gateway from a place of one's choice.

Player Characters who do not want to invest in off-plane beachfront real estate have the option to fight their way in through the main gate (see below) or find some way to smuggle themselves in.

Planar Conditions

Blue Lethary has the following traits:

- Self-contained shape. The seas beyond the beaches 'wrap around' on themselves, so that a person travelling in one direction eventually encounters the islands again.

- Minor positive energy dominant. The plane is filled with radiant things: brilliant sunshine, shimmering beaches and white sand, with a white moon at night that shines twice as brightly as the one back home. All creatures within the plane gain Fast Healing 2 while they remain there.

Renting or Buying Property

Contacting mercanes is not difficult. All of the factions know of them and deal with them; most faction leaders have a mercane contact to whom they can send a swift message.

Mercanes are very efficient when it comes to business. A group of five mercanes from the Koikannu Family arrive within hours of the message being sent, ready with contracts for the Player Characters to sign. The mercanes wear silver eye-cusps and long tailcoats. Their leader is Zelebu-Gwan, a grinning goateed mercane with dozens of rings on each long blue finger. The following deals are available:

Unfortunately, free tours are not available. If they request it, Zelebu-Gwan uses Illusion magic to provide the Player Characters with a preview of Blue Lethary's scenic delights; *scrying*, though more truthful, would be a violation of the guests' privacy. The preview shows fat, happy merchants, city officials and retired tyrants lying on beaches and being brought foaming tankards of beer, swimming among giggling mermaids and gambling vast heaps of gold in plush casinos. A scarred warrior with blond hair and a figure in black spiked armour, presumably meant to represent an evil overlord, are shown clinking glasses together in a toast. Zelebu-Gwan comments, 'Never mind old grudges! Leave your past behind! Why, many old enemies meet each other on our golden beaches and find that they become friends, now that everyone is equally comfortable!'

If the Player Characters ask about the guards, Zelebu-Gwan insists that security is all-important but does not give away any details. 'We specialise in providing peace of mind for those who want to get away from it all! Nobody can pursue you to Blue Lethary and our guards ensure that no violence ever takes place within the plane – except within our designated hunting grounds, where you can stalk and slay the most terrifying beasts in complete safety.'

If the Player Characters try to persuade Zelebu-Gwan that Blue Lethary is in danger, he thanks them politely for their concern but assures them that this is quite impossible: 'We are aware of the planequake, which naturally never reached Blue Lethary because of its seclusion. Our magicians have already established that the upset was due to a perfectly ordinary astral flux-storm, such as our people have known about for many thousands of years. There is nothing to worry about.'

A Sense Motive check (DC 30) reveals that Zelebu-Gwan is lying desperately. He and the rest of the Koikannu Family know that there is a serious threat to Blue Lethary, but if word gets out, the rich and powerful will abandon the place and take their money with them. He cannot afford to let speculation build. A shrewd businessman, he politely puts his papers away and leaves if he thinks the Player Characters are likely to spread stories about imminent disaster. Such people are *not* suited to become tenants of a Blue Lethary home.

If the Player Characters sign up, Zelebu-Gwan collects their funds with a tight smile and passes them their gate key. This is a piece of simple quartz in a golden wire cage, hung from a chain.

Blue Lethary Properties and Assets

Asset	To Rent (per month)	To Buy
Private beach (per 600 feet)	4,000 gp	300,000 gp
Small residence, including beach (sleeps two)	15,000 gp	800,000 gp
Large residence, including beach (sleeps six)	30,000 gp	1,500,000 gp
Private chateau and island (sleeps 40)	80,000 gp	4,000,000 gp
Sailing ship	1,500 gp	18,000 gp
Private permanent *gate* to Blue Lethary from a place of one's choice, subject to approval (includes Small residence and beach)	—	3,000,000 gp

Location: The Main Gate

Blue Lethary's main entrance point is located on the Astral Plane. It is hard to find: unless one has been shown where to look for it, a Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 40) is needed to locate it.

The gate is a broad stone ring like a segment cut from a castle tower, with ripples of whitish energy passing across the centre. Guard towers are mounted on the ring to the north, south, east and west; each houses a Sentinel of the Great Gate (see page 227) created by the mercanes, keeping watch in case an unauthorised person should try to gain access.

Nothing happens to a creature passing through the gate unless it possesses a gate key, in which case it is transported as if by a *plane shift* spell to the main arrival zone in Blue Lethary. A creature who has no key can attempt to activate the gate with a Use Magic Device check (DC 35). Success allows the creature to pass through the gate as if it had a gate key.

Event: Wish You Were Here

This plane feels like eternal summer. The skies are clear, the sun is dazzling and the seas are calm. Waves wash gently against beaches of golden-white sand. The buildings here are exotic structures like the temples of elvenkind, built with sweeping domes and ornate cornices. Brown-skinned people lie on the beaches, splash among the waters or cool themselves in the shade of the buildings. A galleon lies anchored out to sea, with robed figures crowding on the deck and no sign of any ballistae or catapults at all. Indeed, now that you think of it, nobody you can see appears to be armed.

Inland, the streets are lined with palm trees. There is one obvious central building, rather like a cathedral in form, but all the other buildings seem to be dwellings or taverns. The streets are cleaner than any you have ever seen. The shadows look cool and inviting.

Armoured men patrol casually up and down the streets, their full plate blindingly bright in the sunshine, their faces dabbled with sweat. These, at least, are armed. Huge swords hang at their waists and they bear shields with an iron fist design.

A successful Spot check (DC 20) notices a curious lump at each guard's throat. This is a Scarab of Loyalty under the skin (see page 81).

The armoured men are mercenaries from the Iron Fist Security Company (also known simply as 'the Iron Fist'), here to protect the guests from each other and from anyone who might want to settle a score. Many of the residents of Blue Lethary are former slavers, warlords or corrupt monarchs who used their fortunes to secure a place in the sun and have now fled here to escape justice. The mercanes have a vested interest in keeping these people's minds at rest.

The rule for guests and residents on Blue Lethary is 'No Weapons'. A group of guards descends on the Player Characters as soon as they arrive and politely escorts them to the central office so that they can check in their weapons.

Location: Buildings in Blue Lethary

There is not a great deal of variety in Blue Lethary's buildings. They consist of residences, wine shops, brothels, eating houses, docks and guard posts. All the prices are outrageous (from double to triple the usual amount), though nobody objects to this. The businesses in Blue Lethary work under charter from the mercanes. None of the staff are from this plane.

Residences: The houses here are made from wood and white stone and resemble 17th century colonial mansions in the Bahamas. Even the smallest houses look spectacular compared to dwellings back on Ashfar.

Wine Shops: There is little to do in Blue Lethary but indulge oneself. The wine shops are cool, shady bars where the liqueurs and wines of the various planes are on offer. Other narcotics are also available for those who want to curl up on a cushion and smoke. In the evenings, musicians come by to play bizarre extraplanar instruments which they refer to as the 'tambang' and the 'savalut'.

Brothels: As with the wine shops, the planes' infinite variety is found within. The most exotic creatures imaginable are on offer here.

Eating Houses: Blue Lethary's eating houses offer the local bejewelled star-crabs along with fare transported in from other planes. The mercanes themselves supply the bulk of the exotic food, using their *secret chests* to transport it from plane to plane without spoilage.

Guard Posts: There is a guard post on every third street corner. These are simple one-storey towers from which four to six Iron Fist guards keep watch over the residents.

Non-Player Character Group: Iron Fist Security

This band of highly trained fighters works for whomever can pay its exorbitant fees. As the mercanes are never short of money and have always proven reliable, the Iron Fist prefers to deal with them above other clients.

Iron Fist bodyguards accompany mercane traders on their business trips to far worlds and are trusted to look after mercane holdings. When customers try to default on payments, the mercanes send in the Iron Fist to apply pressure.

Typical Iron Fist Security Guard, Human Ftr20: CR 20; Medium humanoid; HD 20d10+40; hp 150; Init +5; Spd 20 ft.; AC 33, touch 11, flat-footed 32; Base Atk +20; Grp +25; Atk +31 melee (1d10+12/17–20, *+5 bastard sword of defending*)

or +30 ranged (1d8+15/x3 nonlethal plus *sleep*, composite longbow (+5 Str bonus)); Full Atk +31/+26/+21/+16 melee (1d10+12/17–20, *+5 bastard sword of defending*) or +30/+25/+20/+15 ranged (1d8+15/x3 nonlethal plus *sleep*, composite longbow (+5 Str bonus)); SQ spell resistance 21; AL N; SV Fort +14, Ref +7, Will +9; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills & Feats: Climb +14, Handle Animal +9, Intimidate +12, Jump +11, Ride +14, Swim +11; Cleave, Dodge, Endurance, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bastard sword), Improved Critical (longbow), Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Mobility, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Run, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Specialisation (bastard sword), Weapon Specialisation (longbow).

Equipment & Treasure: +6 full plate of fortification, *+6 heavy steel shield of great spell resistance*, *+5 bastard sword of defending*, *enhanced sleep arrows* (10), *scarab of loyalty*, composite longbow (+5 Str bonus). However, mercane employers provide all of the Iron Fist operative's equipment. It is not his personal property and must be returned once his contract has expired.

Enhanced Sleep Arrows: These *+8 arrows* have been prepared with heightened *sleep* spells. They function as *sleep arrows*, dealing nonlethal damage and forcing a target to make a Will save (DC 25) or fall asleep.

Scarab of Loyalty: When a member of the Iron Fist signs a contract with a mercane, he is obliged to wear a *scarab of loyalty*. This is a bronze ornament shaped like a beetle and slightly bigger than a gold piece. When placed against the body, the *scarab* briefly comes to life, extends its limbs and burrows under the guard's skin, making an obvious bump at his throat just below the Adam's apple. The process looks gruesome but is completely painless. Any mercane who knows the command phrase can send a telepathic signal to the *scarab* and activate it. When activated, the *scarab* functions as a *scarab of death*, burrowing straight for the victim's heart. The victim may still make a Reflex save (DC 30) to grab it and tear it out, in which case he is only dealt 3d6 points of damage. A second telepathic phrase causes the *scarab* to leave the host's body and become inert. Attempting to remove the *scarab* by any other means causes it to activate.

The mercane owners of the *scarabs of loyalty* very rarely need to activate them, as they are deterrents against betrayal. A bodyguard who is only a thought away from death is not likely to turn on his employer. Besides, if the mercane is killed, there is no guarantee that anyone else knows the *scarab*'s command phrase, so a bodyguard had better be exceptionally careful to keep his charge alive.

Strong Abjuration; CL 19th; Create Wondrous Item, *slay living;* price 80,000 gp.

Non-Player Character Group: The Koikannu Family

The mercanes in control of Blue Lethary like to keep themselves out of sight. They leave the day-to-day running of the place to the tavern owners and traders under the watchful eye of the Iron Fist. They occasionally call on their tenants to make sure everything is satisfactory. Other than this, they remain in the Administrative Building.

Almost all of the Koikannu mercanes are wizards. They shun combat, relying on their Iron Fist bodyguards to deal with any troublemakers.

Typical Koikannu Mercane, Wiz18: CR 23; Large outsider; HD 7d8+21 plus 18d4+54; hp 151; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +16; Grp +22; Atk +18 melee (2d4+3/15–20, masterwork falchion); Full Atk +18/+13/+8/+3 melee (2d4+3/15–20, masterwork falchion); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA spell-like abilities, spells; SQ spell resistance 34, telepathy; SV Fort +14, Ref +14, Will +19; Str 15, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 20, Wis 17, Cha 19.

Skills & Feats: Appraise +30, Bluff +14, Concentration +26, Craft (alchemy) +26, Decipher Script +26, Diplomacy +14, Gather Information +14, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (the planes) +15, Listen +13, Profession (bookkeeper) +34, Sense Motive +13, Sleight of Hand +15, Spellcraft +33, Spot +12; Combat Expertise, Enhance Spell, Enlarge Spell[B], Empower Spell[B], Improved Critical (falchion), Improved Disarm, Improved Feint, Heighten Spell, Maximise Spell, Quicken Spell[B], Scribe Scroll[B], Skill Focus (Concentration) , Tenacious Magic (*globe of invulnerability*).

Note: Mercanes receive a +4 racial bonus on Appraise checks.

Spells prepared (4/6/5/5/5/5/4/3/3/2, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*, *resistance;* 1st – *animate rope*, *identify*, *mage armour*, *reduce person*, *shield*, *true strike;* 2nd – *arcane lock*, *detect thoughts*, *glitterdust*, *mirror image*, *pyrotechnics;* 3rd – *dispel magic*, *displacement*, *explosive runes*, *sepia snake sigil*, *shrink item;* 4th – *arcane eye*, *detect scrying*, *dimensional anchor*, *fear*, *rainbow pattern;* 5th – *baleful polymorph*, *dismissal*, *feeblemind*, *hold monster*, *mage's faithful hound;* 6th – *antimagic field*, *chain lightning*, *globe of invulnerability*, *legend lore;* 7th – *delayed blast fireball*, *lightning bolt* (enhanced), *mage's sword;* 8th – *greater invisibility* (quickened), *irresistible dance*, *maze;* 9th – *foresight*, *mage's disjunction.*

Spell-Like Abilities: 3/day – *dimension door*, *invisibility;* 1/day – *plane shift*, *secret chest*. Caster level 14th; save DC 14 + spell level.

Telepathy (Su): Mercanes can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Equipment & Treasure: Masterwork falchion.

Information: The Rules

The rules of Blue Lethary are displayed on every street corner, engraved on stone slabs in the Common tongue. It is impossible to miss them. When a creature approaches within ten feet, a *magic mouth* appears and reads the rules aloud in sequence, first in Common, then in the various planar languages. They read as follows:

We wish all of our patrons a pleasant stay on our beaches. In order to maximise security, the following rules must be observed at all times.

1. No weapons or damage-dealing items, including items with the power to cause paralysis, sleep, incapacitation or other inconvenience, may be carried, wielded or otherwise employed while on Blue Lethary. Refusal to comply with this will result in forfeiture of the aforesaid items, potential loss of remaining tenure of property and/or ejection from the plane.

2. A degree of spellcasting is permitted. However, no spells that cause harm to another's mind or body may be cast, on penalty of forfeiture of spellbook, potential loss of remaining tenure of property and/or ejection from the plane.

3. The security staff are courteous and efficient and have the right to be treated in a similar manner. Abuse of our staff will not be tolerated.

4. This is a place of tolerance and peace. Violence between guests is unacceptable. Conflicts of interest may be referred to the Official Arbitrator in the Administrative Building who will rule decisively on the matter.

5. Persistent violation of any of the above rules will result in eviction and a lifetime bar from the plane. Refusal to comply with the eviction process will result in the summoning of appropriate agents to deal with the offender with as much force as may be necessary.

By order: The Management.

Location: The Administrative Building

This elegant white structure, set in a green, fountain-filled lawn, looks as if it has been sculpted out of cake frosting. The marble is so thin and delicate that it is translucent. A group of four guards, gleaming mirror-bright in the sunshine, stands by the entrance.

You see a tall blue-skinned humanoid creature pass by them and into the building. It is wearing a strange garment of folded silk, rather like the nobles of Kahoor wear. The guards salute as it passes by.

The Administrative Building is the first port of call for new arrivals. Any Player Characters who arrive on Blue Lethary are shepherded here by the Iron Fist as soon as they are seen.

In the hallway stands a Sentinel of the Great Gate. Its *antimagic field* keeps all nearby magic items suppressed. Under its aegis, three of the Koikannu mercanes attempt to relieve the Player Characters of all their weapons and other damage-dealing equipment such as wands and staves. They explain that these will be stored in a *secret chest* and be kept ready for the Player Characters to collect them when they leave Blue Lethary. Naturally, any attempt to resist is met with opposition: first a firm assertion of the rules, then a forcible confiscation and finally an eviction by means of *dismissal* spells and wanton violence.

Information: Local Rumours

Whether the Player Characters have secured a property or not, they will want to know what is going on around Blue Lethary. A visit to a local wine shop, along with a Gather Information check (DC 20), provides the following information.

- The planequake hit this plane but nobody was particularly worried because the mercanes had it all under control.
- There are many famous criminals here from all planes. One of them, a legendary thief, is said to have stolen an artefact powerful enough to destroy worlds.
- The mercanes have gigantic servants called Sentinels who can block all magic. They have huge blue flaming swords and live under the sea. There is one in the main Administration Building.
- One of the people living here is a drow going by the name of Lovian Harne (Games Master's note: this is the traitor Drozen Vellish under an assumed name.)
- One of the girls in the Brothel of the New Moon is a fallen angel who lost her wings because of insubordination against her lawful lord. She has been excluded from Heaven and now sells her favours as a form of penance.
- There are bejewelled star-crabs living in the sea, which are quite heavenly to taste when roasted.
- There is a wild party planned for tonight on a ship called the *Nevermore.* It belongs to Lord Shadowdrake, who is planning to make a special announcement of some kind. Everyone is very excited about it. The Player Characters should try to come if they possibly can.

Non-Player Character Group: The Residents

All of the other residents here are extremely wealthy and most of them are in late middle age. The Player Characters have to contend with them if they spend any amount of time on Blue Lethary.

The Merchants: The majority of the residents are male merchants who have made their fortunes trading and are now

living out their latter years in comfort. They look down on anyone who has less than they do and cordially loathe one another. None of these characters is a significant threat; for game purposes they are 20th level experts. This group includes:

- Brondius the gem trader (rake-thin and clad in furs, even on the hottest days)
- Carabrandio the silk and spices man (sleek and well-oiled, attended at all times by exotic women)
- Fat Mustic, the Wine Tycoon of Hyzantinum (so bloated he has to be wheeled around in a chair)
- Jackson Duffet, the Slaver of Seven Planes (an eyepatch-wearing ruffian who enjoys mocking the pretensions of the rich)

The merchants get in the Player Characters' way by latching onto them and trying to talk about business. They ask as many questions as they can think of about where the Player Characters are from, how they made their money, where the 'smart money' is this month and whether they think that Blue Lethary is truly secure. They have heard rumours that the plane is in danger and want all the information they can get.

The Criminals: A second group is made up of successful criminals. These are rogues and assassins who have either pulled off a lifetime's worth of careful jobs, investing the proceeds wisely while others drank their way through them and lived the high life, or who have managed one tremendous heist that was so profitable they can now retire. They have come to Blue Lethary for the security it offers; bounty hunters are not welcome here. The luxurious lifestyle is a bonus. In game terms, they are almost all 20th level rogues, with some multiclassed into the assassin prestige class. This group includes:

- Garrick, the legendary silver-eyed Prince of Shadows (tiefling, gaunt and sardonic, unfriendly)
- Barrington Riggs, the Highwayman of Hell (flabby and sun-browned, vulgar, long past his best)
- Liam Nuth, tutor to the robber kings of Aspil (unassuming man who smokes a pipe and likes simple beer)
- Epettu Banph, the Thief-King of Old Kaljeen, the man who stole the Pearl of Devastation (solemn man clad in yellow silk and a turban)

The Warlords: The least populous group is made up of former conquerors and tyrants who have fled their realms with the contents of their treasuries. A ruler of this kind does not surrender his realm voluntarily; they have all been deposed by invading armies or have gotten out while the going was good before upcoming subordinates dethroned them.

The warlords are the most restless and edgy of the people here. Although they enjoy luxury, they miss ruling their dominions and they are not happy going unarmed. Most of them have improvised or smuggled weapons hidden in their homes. In game terms, most of the warlords are 20th level fighters, warriors or aristocrats. Their number includes:

- Lord Shadowdrake, the former ruler of Messevania (a burly half-dragon who obviously has one black dragon parent)
- King Carrion of Wespil (a giggling half-lunatic who is fond of eating the flesh of his enemies)
- Gawa Huli, the Ravager of Sambok (a bearded man with fists like hammers, the former ruler of a plains tribe that sacked and burned city after city)
- Lovian Harne, the Dark Elf (actually Drozen Vellish, the traitor who sold out the drow to the Player Characters in *The Drow War, Book Two*)

Non-Player Character: 'Epettu Banph', otherwise Monark the Stalker

The Player Characters may be intrigued to hear of Epettu Banph and the potent artefact that he supposedly stole. This may be a clue to the mystery of the destroyed planes!

If they pin Epettu Banph down, they can persuade him to tell the tale of how he stole the Pearl of Devastation. He has told the story dozens of times. It involves Epettu sneaking into Heaven itself disguised as an acolyte and making off with the pearl from the jaws of the sleeping Thunder Dragon, the god of Kandang who brings the rain. Epettu cannot show them the pearl, as he has stored it 'somewhere safe', but he confidently boasts that it could destroy entire planes if its power were unlocked.

The whole story is a lie. This man is not the real Epettu Banph; he is not even a rogue. He is an agent for a lawful faction allied to the Inevitables, who want the rogues sheltering in Blue Lethary brought to justice. His true name is Monark the Stalker.

The Player Characters may be able to uncover the deception. A Bardic Lore check (DC 30) reveals that Epettu Banph was supposed to have been killed a decade ago in a deluge of molten gold from a trap he failed to spot, although this will be dismissed as 'mere myth-making on the part of the vulgar' if the Player Characters challenge him with it. The Player Characters may also detect the bluff in the telling. An exceptionally good Sense Motive check (DC 35) notices that 'Epettu' is embroidering his tale a little too much. The *zone of truth* emitted by the Sentinels (see page 229) may also be problematic.

If the Player Characters expose Monark as an impostor, his life is in grave danger. He knows the criminals gathered here will happily deal with him themselves, rules or no rules. Therefore, he will use lethal force to remove anyone who seems to be getting close to the truth. Those he kills will be weighted down with chains and sent to the bottom of the sea. Unlike most, Monark does not need a weapon to be lethal; his monk training means that he *is* a weapon.

Monark the Stalker, Male Human Mnk24: CR 24; Medium outsider (augmented humanoid); HD 24d8+24; hp 132; Init +2; Spd 90 ft.; AC 20, touch 20, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +17; Grp +23; Atk +19 melee (2d10+2/19–20, unarmed strike); Full Atk +19/+19/+19/+14/+9 melee (2d10+2/19–20, unarmed strike flurry of blows); SA *ki* strike (magic, lawful, adamantine), quivering palm, stunning blow; SQ abundant step, damage reduction 10/magic, empty body, immunity to disease (except supernatural and magical), magical aging and poison, improved evasion, resistance to fire 10 and electricity 10, slow fall any distance, speak all languages, spell resistance 34; AL LN; SV Fort +15, Ref +16, Will +18 (+20 against enchantment); Str 14, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 18, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +10, Escape Artist +9, Hide +9, Listen +14, Move Silently +22, Sense Motive +24, Spot +14, Swim +9, Tumble +9; Blind-Fight, Dodge, Deflect Arrows[B], Energy Resistance (electrical), Energy Resistance (fire), Improved Critical (unarmed strike), Improved Disarm[B], Improved Unarmed Strike[B], Mobility, Snatch Arrows, Spring Attack, Stunning Fist[B], Weapon Focus (unarmed strike).

Abundant Step (Su): Monark can slip magically between spaces as if using the spell *dimension door* once per day. His caster level for this effect is 12th.

Empty Body (Su): Monark has the ability to assume an ethereal state for 24 rounds per day as though using the spell *etherealness*. He may go ethereal on a number of different occasions during any single day, as long as he spends no more than 24 rounds in an ethereal state.

Quivering Palm (Su): Monark can set up vibrations within the body of another creature that can thereafter be fatal if he so desires. He can use this quivering palm attack once a week; the intent must be stated before the attack is made. Constructs, oozes, plants, undead, incorporeal creatures and creatures immune to critical hits cannot be affected. Otherwise, if he strikes successfully and the target is dealt damage from the blow, the quivering palm attack succeeds. Thereafter Monark can try to slay the victim at any later time, as long as the attempt is made within 24 days. To make such an attempt, he merely wills the target to die as a free action; unless the target makes a Fortitude save (DC 26), it dies. If the save is successful, the target is no longer in danger from that particular quivering palm attack, but it may still be affected by another one at a later time.

Non-Player Character: Kovanielle the Fallen

The woman before you has a sad smile and eyes that convey a terrible desolation. She is beautiful, more so than any mortal woman. It seems strange that someone of such unearthly good looks should be here by choice.

Kovanielle the Fallen is the angel who works at the Brothel of the New Moon. Most of the residents know a little of her story: she was cast out of Heaven for rebellion and lost her wings. Most of them believe that either she is forced to work in a brothel as an act of humiliation for her pride or she has entered the trade as a voluntary penance.

Neither story is wholly true. Though she did leave Heaven, it was a voluntary departure. Kovanielle has a deep and tragic love for mortals and has borne half-celestial children to many. She is moved by unbearable pity for them, simply because they are doomed to die after such short lives. Instead of serving the cause of Heaven as an obedient angel, she chooses instead to comfort mortals directly. Here, in this place of vice and indulgence, she has found many in need of comfort.

Kovanielle welcomes overtures of friendship from the Player Characters if they are of non-evil alignment. If they establish trust and discuss the planequake with her, she shares what she knows. She has not visited Heaven in forty years but remembers some important details from her time there:

- Even forty years ago, many of the Heavenly Host believed that the Last Days were coming soon. They would have to be ready to face the hordes of Hell and defend the souls of men from their infernal hunger. Walking away from Heaven when she did, Kovanielle was seen as the worst kind of deserter. The angels' conviction was apparently based upon a prophecy, the *Script of the Diamond Tablet*, sealed in a vault in Heaven and accessible only to the senior archangels.

- If the Player Characters mention the possibility that the Dark is behind this, Kovanielle believes this to be unlikely. During her time as a warrior angel, the Heavenly Host would sometimes convene to discuss the potential threat posed by the Dark, the power of negation that lurks outside the manifest universe. The Dark was known to act through the drow of Ashfar, who seemed to be its only chosen agents. As it always seemed content to wage its wars through them, the angels never agreed on a strategy to use if it should expand its activities. Perhaps now that the game of pawns has been decisively won, the Dark wants to overturn the game board in fury; but could a power of such cosmic scope really be so petty?

- Very little is known about the Dark, even after all this time. The angels believed for millennia that it was a mindless force, a mere lifeless void. When it began to act through the drow it surprised everyone. It was clear that the Dark had either spontaneously developed sentience somehow or had borrowed a mind to use as its own.

- Kovanielle is loath to reveal her final secret unless she is convinced that the fate of the universe really does hang in the balance. One angel, Tuvellan the Firecrowned, was certain that the Dark had been conscious all along and was only now choosing to act. He was determined to make contact with the Dark and persuade it to withdraw. He insisted that the Dark was perhaps not evil but merely a necessary part of the Universe. Perhaps it could be spoken with, reasoned with. Tuvellan departed Heaven on a quest to find the conscious core of the Dark and speak to it. That was two centuries ago; he has not been seen or heard of since.

Event: Party on the *Nevermore*

On the night of the Player Characters' arrival, Lord Shadowdrake (a 20th level fighter) holds a party on his sailing ship, the *Nevermore.* The Player Characters can find out about this easily but they have to wangle themselves invitations or sneak aboard, as they do not yet have any status among the residents.

Shadowdrake can be found during the day at one of the drinking houses or brothels. He may decide to invite the Player Characters if they impress him with bloodthirsty tales of their exploits. He respects those who have spent their lives conquering, have scars to show and believe in taking what they want. Milksops and scholarly types such as wizards and clerics are not invited; Shadowdrake spits on such people. As a last resort, the Player Characters may be invited as entertainers, though if they try this route they are looked down upon as mere minstrels rather than peers.

Wine, Women and Song: All of the listed Non-Player Characters, including Epettu Banph (Monark the Stalker) and Drozen Vellish, are at the party. It does not take long for the celebration to turn rowdy, with so many evil types present and so much alcohol flowing. After three hours fistfights break out and the mercanes (who use *arcane eye* spells to observe the event) have to call one of their Sentinels out of the sea to separate the fighters.

The party is an ideal opportunity for the Player Characters to collect rumours, find out whether anyone knows about a threat to the plane and make contacts. If they have already found out about the drow house (see below), they can investigate it while everyone else is focusing on the party.

Event: Oh No, Not You Again

Among the retired criminals and former warlords living the high life on Blue Lethary is an old familiar face: the traitor Drozen Vellish from *The Drow War, Book Two*, staying here under the name Lovian Harne. Having received a substantial reward for betraying his people and revealing the plans for the Ironclads, he invested it in a modest dwelling here and planned to live out the rest of his days in comfort and seclusion. The days are too sunny for a drow, but the moonlit nights are balmy and pleasant.

First Encounter: The Player Characters catch sight of a drow male heading into a bar. A successful Spot check (DC 20) identifies him as Drozen if the Player Character in question has seen him before. If they attempt to follow him, the Games Master should give Drozen a chance to notice that he is being tailed. He uses a *teleport* spell to get back to his dwelling if he notices that he has been spotted.

Second Encounter: Assuming the Player Characters do not manage to track Drozen down, they meet him again on the *Nevermore*, where he cannot easily escape, as he is in the midst of people he wishes to impress. He does not want to be exposed as a traitor and sell-out. He tries to use his Bluff skill to send a surreptitious message to the Player Characters: 'Meet you later, will explain everything.'

Drozen is far from happy at meeting his old associates again. He was hoping to put his past behind him. He tells the Player Characters all that he knows, on the understanding that they will then go a very long way away and not trouble him again:

- He is not aware of any plans to annihilate the plane. The very idea seems ridiculous.

- The planequake did affect this region but the mercanes explained it away as an 'astral flux storm'. As the plane is so small, they were able to limit the damage the rifts could do.

- The mercanes have plenty of Sentinels to call upon. They keep them under the sea, as it is bad for business to have colossi with flaming swords towering over the islands. It does not make the place feel suitably relaxing.

- Drozen is the only drow here; as such, he is something of a curiosity to the other guests. However, there was a group of three other drow here two weeks ago. One of the mercanes was showing them around. Drozen hid himself away until they had gone, not wanting to be seen and recognised. He later learned that they had rented a house for a month, though they have not yet moved in. He has no idea what they were doing here. At first he assumed that they had tracked him down and were going to try to kill him; now that they have gone, he is left to guess what their purpose may have been.

If Drozen Is Dead: If Drozen Vellish died during the events of *The Drow War, Book Two*, the Games Master should replace him with Ashni Cobriana, another drow turncoat who defected just before the recapture of Jehannum. Ashni recognises the Starborn (if they are not somehow disguised) from the war and reacts as above.

Information: The Drow Plot

The drow who visited two weeks ago were conducting reconnaissance and preparing to plant a planar destruction device. Blue Lethary was not their first choice for a plane to destroy. There are too many people here and the mercanes are competent wizards – exactly the kind of opposition a magical terrorist does not want. Nonetheless, it was necessary to make preparations in case something went wrong with the destruction of the other planes.

Location: The Drow House

The three drow who came here two weeks ago rented a mansion. The Player Characters can find out where it is by asking at the Administrative Building, though any mercane asked raises an eyebrow and asks the reason for their inquiry. Alternatively, asking questions in the wine shops and a successful Gather Information check (DC 25) turns up the location of the house. It is located on a stretch of beach to the south of the island; not the best of plots of land, as it has only a thin rocky beach, which does not receive as much sunlight as others because of the overshadowing cliffs:

This two-storey residence sits quiet and still. There is no sound but that of the gently lapping waves. All of the windows are shut and the sun-bleached front door is closed. On the porch is a wicker chair with a velvet cushion. Beside it sits an empty wine bottle. It does not look as though there is anyone here at all.

Attempts to find tracks – requiring a Survival check (DC 36) plus the Tracking feat – reveal the footprints of three Medium humanoids and one Large humanoid heading up to the door. The Large humanoid's footprints move away again but the three other sets of footprints do not.

Empty Rooms: The only rooms of significance are the numbered ones. Other rooms contain only sumptuous furniture covered with white sheets to keep the dust off.

1. Dining Hall: This is where the three drow discussed their strategy for destroying Blue Lethary. The furniture in the room has been uncovered. Three chairs have been set around a brilliantly polished table upon which stand three empty wineglasses.

A successful Search check (DC 40) discovers the almost invisibly faint impression of writing on the polished tabletop where one of the drow took notes. The writing is only partially legible. A Player Character examining it can make out the words *'Too many sent-'*, *'because of the aura*' and *'if something should go wrong at M'*. A successful Decipher Script check (DC 40) discerns more of the text:

'Cons: too many sentries, potential suppression at critical moment.'

'Completed apparatus may be detected by mercanes because of the aura.'

'Keep as reserve option if something should go wrong at Muzziomone.'

2. Wine Cellar: The drow stored their partially complete plane-destroying apparatus here, retrieving the pieces from their *secret chest*:

Half-visible in the gloom is an arcane device of some kind, its purpose far from obvious. It looks like a cylinder made from metal rods. The metal looks like adamantine. Within the cylinder are two transparent spheres three feet across, one above the other. A hairline seam runs around the circumference of each sphere. They hang without visible support, not touching each other or the walls of their metal cage.

The device radiates a strong aura of Evocation magic.

A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 40) allows a character to guess at what the device might do. The spheres either do contain or *will* contain something dangerous. The cylinder's interior emits powerful fields of force that keep the spheres separate. Clearly, activating the device will either cause the two spheres to be brought forcibly together, merge them in some way, or use them as the thaumaturgic power source for some epic spell.

Traps: The drow do not want their secrets pried into. Touching the cylinder triggers a pair of lethal magical traps. The effect of the first is to annihilate the device in a sizzling blaze of energy that turns the device to dust and does immense damage to the creature triggering the trap. The second *plane shifts* all remaining creatures in the room to the Elemental Plane of Fire using a heightened *plane shift* spell. These effects activate simultaneously and count as two separate traps which must each be discovered and disabled before the device can be moved safely.

***Greater Ruin* Trap:** CR 21; magic device; touch trigger; no reset; single target; spell effect (*greater ruin* epic spell, 35d6 damage to single target (Fortitude DC 30 half damage), device destroyed), Search DC 35, Disable Device DC 35.

***Plane Shift* Trap:** CR 11; magic device; touch trigger; no reset; affects all targets in 40 ft. radius; spell effect (multiple *plane shift* heightened to 10th level, 26th level wizard, transportation to Elemental Plane of Fire, Will save (DC 30) negates); Search DC 35, Disable Device DC 35.

Further Complications: The discharge of the *greater ruin* trap is noisy and brings a Sentinel to investigate within 1d6+4 rounds. The Sentinel immediately calls for mercane assistance, bringing a mercane wizard *teleporting* from the Administration Building. The mercane descends to the cellar to see what is amiss.

Aftermath

The device and the faint inscription on the table are the only useful clues the Player Characters can bring back from Blue Lethary. Bringing back one of these is worth a story award equivalent to a CR 24 challenge; bringing back both raises the award to that of a CR 25 challenge.

Sharing Information: Assuming they find out about the drow presence here, the members of the Threnody in Velvet become excited and agitated. They insist that this is the proof that confirms what they have said all along: it is their own kinsmen, the drow of Ashfar, who are behind this.

Bodiless Ao finds the cylindrical device fascinating. He examines it thoroughly and finally announces that it is a mechanism for the forcible breeding of shy fruitbats. He then declares that he now has a headache from all that thinking and retires to his chambers.

Lady Myonatix pretends that she has seen something like this before but she is very vague as to where and when: 'On a rather charming plane, about twenty years ago, where a little group of wizards were living. Can't remember the name, I'm afraid, but I'm sure it'll come back to me.' This is a lie. Myonatix is feeling scared and overwhelmed here and is desperate for something to bargain with. Unwisely, she uses this tactic as a means to ingratiate herself with the Player Characters, insinuating that she knows more than she is willing to say but will confide in them.

Muzziomone

The plane of Muzziomone is a place of quiet harmony and order. It is a three-hundred-mile wide disc of land covered entirely by forest. At the limits of the plane the forest becomes an impenetrable thicket, a seemingly infinite *wall of thorns* that not even a druid can pass.

The trees within the forest resemble those of the Material Plane but have a sense of great age about them, as if they have grown undisturbed for countless centuries. Amid the oaks and birches grow gigantic oaks, a species quite unknown on Ashfar, towering above the lesser trees like parents or guardians.

These giant oaks are the homes of clans of paragon kobolds, who are as far beyond the yapping annoyances of the Material Plane as angels are beyond men. The slow time flow in Muzziomone, along with the meddling of human magicians thousands of years ago, has allowed the kobolds to evolve far beyond their original capabilities. With their heightened Intelligence, they prefer to co-operate rather than compete. Many of them have become lawful neutral over the years rather than lawful evil, though some holdouts still remain (see page 93 for their statistics).

There was once a human settlement here populated by an isolationist colony of Kandang sorcerers, but the kobolds overran it many thousands of years ago and now all that is left is a ruin. The kobolds have no taste for stone dwellings.

The paragon kobolds are strong enough to meet most threats but there are still some beasts prowling the forest that pose a danger to them, so they live in carven and *wood shaped* tree-dwellings high above the forest floor. The most prominent of the kobold clans is that of the Shakkilikki, who have a stringently ordered society.

Previous Events: Two significant events have taken place in Muzziomone. The drow attempted to install one of their planar destruction cylinders on Muzziomone, thinking it would be an easy place to devastate. The kobolds observed the drow from afar and, taking them by surprise, slew them all. This happened less than two weeks ago on the time scale of the Material Plane, but to the kobolds it is now 504 years in the past. It is remembered as a piece of obscure history.

More recently, a mere seventy years or so ago, the planequake broke open rifts into other planes. These brought the *sirrush*, monstrous creatures from a chaotic plane. To the kobolds, who call the sirrush *'lastaritari'*, this seemed like the end of the world. The beasts tore down the sacred trees and devoured the kobolds by the dozen. Ever since the coming of the lastaritari, the kobolds have lived in fear. The higher classes of the kobolds have begun to see the lower classes not just as serfs but as cannon fodder who can be devoured by the beasts if this will save the life of a higher kobold.

Planar Conditions

Muzziomone has the following traits:

- Finite shape. The thickets form the lateral boundary of the plane. The skies above are endless, as is the earth below.
- Impeded magic: fire. Spells of the fire subtype are difficult to cast here. To cast a spell successfully, a character must succeed at a Spellcraft check (DC 20 + the level of the spell). If the check fails, the spell does not function but is still lost as a prepared spell or spell slot. If the check succeeds, the spell functions normally.
- Strongly lawful-aligned. A –2 circumstance penalty applies on all Charisma-based checks made by all creatures who are not lawful. In addition, the –2 penalty affects all Intelligence-based and Wisdom-based checks, too.
- Slow time flow. For every year that passes on Muzziomone, one hour goes by on the Material Plane.

Event: Arrival at Muzziomone

You have arrived in a forest where the trees seem to have grown for countless years. There are no paths, nor any signs of civilisation. The only route is between the thick trunks and over the exposed roots which snake from trunk to trunk, thick as a giant's arms. This unfettered growth seems natural and right here. There is no sense of chaos about it.

The overhead canopy of leafy branches veils the area completely from the sky. You have no idea whether this plane even has *a sky; there is a little light filtering through, however, so presumably it does. The place is a silent mystery, with only the faint rustling of leaves to disturb the peace. The air here is cool and the shade is pleasant.*

Searching the area for tracks with a Search check (DC 40) reveals the residual trails of around twenty Small creatures crossing the area from northwest to southeast. Four of the creatures have left deeper prints than the rest, suggesting that they were burdened down with something. This was a kobold hunting party retrieving game from a snare. The tracks lead to the Heart-Tree (see below).

While the Player Characters explore their surroundings they make enough noise for the local fauna to hear them because of the fallen leaves (unless the players *specifically* state that they are trying to move quietly). After a few rounds of exploring, they hear a weird reverberating roar from the north. This is one of the roaming sirrush, which has heard the footfalls of bipeds and is now bellowing a challenge. Unless the Player Characters leave the area promptly, it will come looking for them.

Location: The Heart-Tree

The tree before you is vaster than a fortress. All you can see of it is a wall of wrinkled bark rising into the storm of leaves and branches. Many dark depressions like little tunnels are dotted here and there in the tree's sides, each about the right size for a halfling to climb into. You have an overpowering feeling of being watched, though there is no apparent sign of humanoid life.

This is where the Shakkilikki are nesting. The colony here is made up of six hundred paragon kobolds. If the Player Characters examine the branches and hollows from their vantage point, they have a chance to notice a group of them, who are taking 10 on their Hide checks; a Spot check (DC 36), including a +2 circumstance bonus for the surroundings, is required to notice the kobolds. This group is watching for the sirrush they have heard bellowing from the northern forest. They are hoping it stumbles into the pit they have dug.

There are ten kobolds in the group, all watching the Player Characters intently. They are partly curious at the appearance of new creatures and partly annoyed that they may mess up the pit plan.

The Pit

At the point indicated, there is a 20-foot-square pit covered with a mat of woven branches and leaves. The pit is 30 feet deep with wooden stakes at the bottom. The plan is to lure the sirrush into the pit and then pelt it with slingstones and spears while it struggles to get out. The kobolds' excellent trapmaking skills make this pit harder to detect than most.

Covered Pit: Search DC 29; damage 3d6 falling plus 1d4 attacks from spiked sticks (+20 melee, 1d6 plus disease (filth fever)), Reflex save (DC 29) avoids.

How this encounter proceeds from here depends on the Player Characters' behaviour.

Waiting: If the Player Characters simply wait to see what happens next, the kobolds also play the waiting game. Eventually the sirrush arrives.

Attacking: Attacking the kobolds brings a flurry of sling bullets from nine of the kobolds in the tree. The tenth dives inside through an opening and sounds an alarm. Two rounds later, twenty more kobolds emerge from the openings and rain sling bullets down on the Player Characters until they go away. If the Player Characters start to make headway against the kobolds, they retreat inside the tree and mobilise the whole population for war.

Parley: Attempts to communicate with the kobolds bring no reaction at first. They do talk back with isolated yaps and barks, but it soon becomes clear that these kobolds do not speak any language that the Player Characters understand; their tongue is a very distorted, evolved version of Draconic. An Intelligence check (DC 30) identifies this as the language,

though it does not make their words any more comprehensible. Magic or a class feature is necessary if the Player Characters are to address the Shakkilikki intelligibly.

If the Player Characters are persistent and respectful, one of the kobolds vanishes into the tree, emerging shortly afterwards with a much older-looking kobold with sagging skin and a slim wooden staff. This kobold (a member of the upperbranch elite; see page 93 for his statistics) simply watches the Player Characters for several rounds, again making no comment, before addressing them in a torrent of gibberish. If the Player Characters have used magic to render the kobolds' speech comprehensible, they hear him say:

'Root trippers. We do not know you. Are you of the ruin of stones? Are you allied to the pork-fleshed? Which of our legends are you? Do you come to lead the Gnawers of Gnawers against us? Do you bring meat?'

A little patient questioning establishes that the 'ruin of stones' is the ruined city and the 'pork-fleshed' are some sort of legendary creatures that are now no more. The Player Characters do not have time for a lengthy dialogue, because the roaming sirrush breaks into the clearing at a suitably dramatic point.

The Sirrush Arrives

Bounding into the clearing, groaning as it moves like an armoured war-wagon, comes a creature that looks as if some warped magician created it out of bone and claws. It is covered with thick armour plates fused onto a muscular body. The claws on its feet are sabre-like and its jaws look as if they can snap fallen pine trunks as easily as twigs. It looks around, sniffing the air, neck muscles straining to keep its heavy head erect.

If it sees the Player Characters, the sirrush (see page 230) claws the ground and snarls, clearly warning them to get out of the way. If they establish communication with it, such as through magic, it haughtily informs them that it is one of the rightful lords of this place and that they should be so good as to step aside unless they wish to challenge it. Unless they leave promptly, it attacks. The Games Master should allow it a chance to notice the pit; if it finds the trap, it contemptuously claws at the mat of branches and slowly walks around it.

The Shakkilikki watch the sirrush fighting the Player Characters without doing anything at all until it becomes clear that one side or the other is winning. If the sirrush begins to lose the fight, they hurl sling bullets and spears at it from the tree and then pour out in a wave of twenty warriors, hoping to kill it or drive it off.

If the Player Characters begin to lose, the Shakkilikki throw down a knotted rope and urge them to climb it so that they can hide in the relative safety of the tree branches. The first branches emerge forty feet above the ground, as the tree is so huge. The kobolds are not willing to allow the Player Characters into the tree itself, but they can avoid the sirrush by nestling in the branches. It can climb the trunk, but the foliage is too thick for it to pass.

The sirrush is not stupid and will not let itself be killed easily. If reduced to 50 or fewer hit points, it turns and flees, bellowing in pain, heading for the ruined city where Kashtari Damakka dwells. She must be warned about this new threat. The kobolds jump up and down and squeal that the *lastaritari* is making for the home of its mother.

At this point the Player Characters have the option to pursue the fleeing sirrush, followed by a tide of excited kobolds. If they choose not to, the sirrush escapes and warns its mother; if they do follow it, a new threat arises.

The Worm: The unusual noise of a group of creatures stampeding across a forest floor in pursuit of a heavy beast calls a Colossal purple worm to the surface. Its first act is to attack the wounded sirrush, trying to swallow it. Once the sirrush is out of the way, it turns on the Player Characters and the kobolds.

Titanic Purple Worm: CR 23; Colossal magical beast; HD 48d10+480; hp 744; Init -2; Spd 20 ft., burrow 20 ft., swim 10 ft.; AC 23, touch 0, flat-footed 23; Base Atk +48; Grp +84; Atk +61 melee (4d8+20/19–20, bite); Full Atk +61 melee (4d8+20/19–20, bite) and +56 melee (3d6+10 plus poison, sting); Space/Reach 30 ft./20ft.; SA improved grab, poison, swallow whole; SQ fast healing 6, tremorsense 60 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +36, Ref +24, Will +15; Str 50, Dex 6, Con 30, Int 1, Wis 8, Cha 8.

Skills & Feats: Listen +34, Swim +40; Ability Focus (poison), Armour Skin (3), Awesome Blow, Cleave, Fast Healing (3), Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Natural Attack (bite), Overwhelming Critical (bite), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (sting).

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the purple worm must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can attempt to swallow the foe the following round.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 46, initial damage 1d6 Strength, secondary damage 2d6 Strength. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Swallow Whole (Ex): The purple worm can try to swallow a grabbed opponent of a smaller size than itself by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent is dealt 3d8+20 points of crushing damage plus 24 points of acid damage per round from the worm's gizzard. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using a light slashing or piercing weapon to deal 25 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 17). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out. The worm's interior can hold two Huge, eight Large, 32 Medium, 128 Small, or 512 Tiny or smaller opponents.

Non-Player Character Group: Runners and Gnawers

The kobolds divide the creatures of Muzziomone (other than themselves) into *sirri* or 'runners' and *lastari* or 'gnawers'. Runners are the wild animals that live here. These include wild boar, deer, badgers, rabbits and similar forest fauna. Gnawers are the much larger monsters that prey upon them and upon the kobolds when they can catch them. When a kobold talks of 'gnawers' he usually means purple worms of Colossal size who 'gnaw at the root' of the Heart-Tree; they are symbolic as well as literal threats.

For many years the immense worms were all the kobolds had to worry about. They remained underground almost all the time, surfacing only briefly. The planequake changed all that. Now the greatest threats to the creatures who live on this plane are the *lastaritari* or 'Gnawers of Gnawers': the sirrush, who are not native to the place and represent unwelcome chaos. They are called 'Gnawers of Gnawers' because they have been observed to kill and eat the purple worms.

In the kobolds' worldview, a sirrush is the worst of all demons. It is the 'accursed beast' that 'respects not the Law, nor the Tree that is the Father of Law; it tears the bark of the Father with its teeth and rakes the flesh of the earth with its talons'. Sirrush have only been here since the planequake, remembered as the Time of the Coming of the Lastaritari.

The sirrush have bred since they first came here. There is now a population of thirty beasts roving across the three-hundred-mile-wide disc of Muzziomone. Most kobold tribes are able to stay out of their way but some have been destroyed altogether, their Heart-Trees smashed down and the populace devoured.

Sirrush (Lastaritari): CR 24; Large magical beast; HD 40d10+680; hp 900; Init +23; Spd 90 ft.; AC 44, touch 24, flat-footed 29; Base Atk +40; Grp +60; Atk +56 melee (2d6+16/19–20, claw); Full Atk +56 melee (2d6+16/19–20, 4 claws) and +54 melee (4d6+8, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA pounce, stunning roar; SQ blindsight 300 ft., damage reduction 10/epic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 20, low-light vision, resistance to acid 10, cold 10, electrical 10, fire 10 and sonic 10, scent, spell resistance 39; AL CE; SV Fort +39, Ref +37, Will +27; Str 42, Dex 40, Con 44, Int 21, Wis 38, Cha 28.

Skills & Feats: Climb +59, Hide +58, Jump +83, Listen +57, Move Silently +58, Spot +57, Survival +57; Blinding Speed (4), Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (claw), Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Overwhelming Critical (claw), Power Attack, Superior Initiative, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).

Head Loss Resistance (Ex): A sirrush's thick bony plate protects its neck like a shield and provides resistance from effects that could normally behead it, such as vorpal weapons. When a sirrush or Kashtari Damakka would otherwise lose its head, it instead makes a Fortitude save (DC 10 + ½ HD of attacker + attacker's Strength modifier). On a failed save the sirrush's head leaves its shoulders normally, but on a successful save the sirrush is unaffected by the beheading. A sirrush dies when beheaded; a three-headed sirrush goes on fighting until all its heads are lost. The only penalty it incurs is one or two fewer bite attacks when it makes a full attack.

Pounce (Ex): If a sirrush charges or leaps upon a foe during its first round of combat, it can make a full attack even if it has already taken a move action.

Stunning Roar (Ex): Every 1d4 rounds, a sirrush can loose a sonic attack of such volume that it stuns all creatures in a 60-foot spread for 1d4 rounds if they fail a Fortitude save (DC 47, or DC 51 for Kashtari Damakka). The DC is Constitution-based.

Kashtari Damakka

The kobolds' greatest terror is reserved for Kashtari Damakka, the Gnawer with Many Mouths, a legendary three-headed sirrush who was the first to arrive here and laid eggs that hatched into the other sirrush.

Kashtari Damakka is the kobold equivalent of a goddess of havoc and evil; though most sirrush are not evil by alignment, she and her brood are content to kill and eat intelligent creatures. She is not fussy about what she or her children consume. Who cares if their food tries to plea for its life?

Few have sighted Kashtari Damakka and lived to tell of it; she lives near the ruined city.

Kashtari Damakka, Female Three-Headed Sirrush: CR 28; Large magical beast; HD 45d10+855; hp 1,102; Init +25; Spd 120 ft.; AC 50, touch 26, flat-footed 33; Base Atk +45; Grp +67; Atk +63 melee (3d6+18/19–20, claw); Full Atk +63 melee (3d6+18/19–20, 4 claws), +61 melee (4d6+9, 3 bites); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft. ; SA pounce, stunning roar; SQ blindsight 350 ft., damage reduction 10/epic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 25, low-light vision, resistance to acid 15, cold 15, electrical 15, fire 15 and sonic 15, scent, spell resistance 42, AL CE; SV Fort +45, Ref +43, Will +33; Str 47, Dex 45, Con 49, Int 26, Wis 43, Cha 33.

Skills & Feats: Balance +65, Climb +66, Hide +65, Intimidate +59, Jump +102, Listen +64, Move Silently +65, Search +56, Spot +64, Survival +64; Blinding Speed (6), Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (claw), Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Overwhelming Critical (claw), Power Attack, Superior Initiative, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).

Non-Player Character Group: The Shakkilikki

The Shakkilikki have evolved their entire philosophy of life around trees and how one lives in them. The 'high' is always superior to the 'low'. *Above* are found fruits that sustain life, shelter, security from the roving beasts and proximity to the heavens. *Below*, in the place where the dung drops, are found dangerous animals, the bodies of those who fall out of the trees and rot, treacherous roots that trip the unwary, muddy pools that swallow one up and the great worms who sometimes rise and cause devastation.

Between *above* and *below* are the great trees, the lawful mediators. To a Shakkilikki, the proper ordering of things can always be learned from a tree.

The upper classes of the Shakkilikki are literally *upper*. They occupy the higher branches. No inferior may approach without making the proper obeisance. The Player Characters are *donfa* or 'root-trippers' in the eyes of the upper-caste Shakkilikki.

Shakkilikki Warrior, Paragon Kobold War1: CR 16; Small humanoid (reptilian); HD 1d8+19; hp 27; Init +9; Spd 90 ft.; AC 49, touch 44, flat-footed 40; Base Atk +1; Grp +4; Atk +34 melee (1d6+27/x3, spear) or +36 ranged (1d3+27, sling); Full Atk +34 melee (1d6+27/x3, spear) or +36 ranged (1d3+27, sling); SQ damage reduction 10/epic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 20, light sensitivity, resistance to cold 10 and fire 10; AL LN; SV Fort +19, Ref +19, Will +17; Str 24, Dex 28, Con 25, Int 25, Wis 24, Cha 23.

Skills & Feats: Craft (trapmaking) +19, Hide +24, Listen +20, Move Silently +20, Profession (miner) +18, Search +19, Spot +18; Alertness, Combat Reflexes[B].

Equipment & Treasure: Sling, sling bullets (10), spear.

Shakkilikki Upperbranch Elite, Paragon Kobold Sor10: CR 25; Small humanoid (reptilian); HD 10d4+190; hp 230; Init +9; Spd 90 ft.; AC 49, touch 44, flat-footed 40; Base Atk +5; Grp +8; Atk +39 melee (1d6+27/x3, spear) or +41 ranged (1d3+27, sling); Full Atk +38/+33 melee (1d6+27/x3, spear) or +40/+35 ranged (1d3+27, sling); SA spells; SQ damage reduction 10/epic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 20, light sensitivity, resistance to cold 10 and fire 10; AL LN; SV Fort +20, Ref +22, Will +24; Str 24, Dex 28, Con 25, Int 25, Wis 24, Cha 25.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +20, Concentration +20, Craft (trapmaking) +30, Hide +24, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Listen +25, Move Silently +25, Profession (miner) +18, Search +19, Spellcraft +20, Spot +23, Tumble +19; Alertness, Combat Reflexes.

Spells known (6/8/8/8/6/4, save DC 17 + spell level): 0th *– daze, detect magic, detect poison, flare, light, mage hand, mending, message, resistance;* 1st *– enlarge person, mage armour, obscuring mist, shield, true strike;* 2nd *– acid arrow, mirror image, spider climb, summon swarm;* 3rd *– displacement, lightning bolt, rage;* 4th *– hallucinatory terrain, stoneskin;* 5th *– hold monster*.

Equipment & Treasure: Lesser metamagic rod of maximise, sling, sling bullets (10), spear.

Non-Player Character Group: Rival Kobold Tribes

If the Player Characters venture to the south or west, they encounter other tribes of paragon kobolds who are no friends of the Shakkilikki. These are the Gronya and the Roff. For game purposes their statistics are identical to those of the Shakkilikki, except that their alignment is lawful evil instead of lawful neutral.

The evil kobold tribes were responsible for overrunning the human settlement and slaughtering the Kandang sorcerers who lived there. They share the Shakkilikki's hatred of the sirrush but will not be especially kindly disposed towards the Player Characters even if the group slays one. They are more likely to demand that they go and kill more, and will be glad to give directions.

The Games Master can use the rival tribes to add more tension and combat potential to this adventure. The other tribes consider the ruined city to be their territory (even if they do not go there anymore on account of the Mother of Desolation) so they stalk those who come near. A band of Shakkilikki leading the Player Characters to the ruined city will be a perfect target for a Gronya war-band. The Gronya and the Roff assume that 'the friend of my enemy is my enemy' and will try to kill the Player Characters just for associating with the Shakkilikki.

Tribal Relics: The upperbranch elites of the Gronya wear plundered relics from the city, handed down from ruler to ruler. These are now very battered and filthy with age but are still recognisable as magicians' jewellery, evidently from one of the provinces of Kandang. They include:

- The ornamental dragon crown worn by senior Kandang sorcerers (a platinum headband in the form of an undulating dragon, bearing a pearl in its right foreclaw that is situated at the centre of the wearer's forehead), worth 7,500 gold pieces.

- A ceremonial robe, heavy as banded armour, woven from gold and silver thread so that it is more of a metal mesh than a cloth garment, worth 18,000 gold pieces.

- A set of four bejewelled Rings of Mastery bestowed upon those Kandang sorcerers who achieved distinction in their field, each worth 5,000 gold pieces.

Event: Kobold Hospitality

With the sirrush out of the way, the Player Characters can converse with the kobolds, assuming they are not already on unfriendly terms. The spokesman for the Shakkilikki is Exalted Yif, a bug-eyed specimen who insists on sitting above the Player Characters at all times so that he can look down on them. He is greatly interested in the Player Characters' histories, how they came to be here, what their home is like and whether there are any Shakkilikki there.

If the Player Characters tell stories of the kobolds from back home and portray them as they actually are, the Shakkilikki become offended and unhelpful. They accuse the Player Characters of insulting them. The Games Master should milk this encounter for tension, as Exalted Yif is convinced there are more of his people beyond this plane and is suspicious of lesser creatures' motives. A Player Character claiming that kobolds are weak and considered a pest where he comes from will be seen as merely jealous, deriding those he knows to be better than himself.

A Diplomacy check (DC 30) is needed to persuade the Shakkilikki to open up about their background. As well as specific legends (see below), the Player Characters can learn the general background of the area. There have been no new creatures here since the sirrush came. There were once creatures somewhat like the Player Characters, long ago, who lived in the Ruin Place of Stones. Kashtari Damakka, the Mother of Desolation, lives there now.

Information: The Legends

If Exalted Yif decides that the Player Characters are not a threat, he calls for one of the song-singers from the middle branches to relate a legend for them. They may choose to hear the legend of the pork-fleshed ones, the legend of the coming of the Gnawers of Gnawers or the legend of the Ruin Place of Stones. They may not hear more than one in any one night. If they wish to hear more on a future occasion, they must do a great service for the Shakkilikki, such as destroying the hated Kashtari Damakka. According to Shakkilikki tradition, the legends have power and it is forbidden to sing more than one in a night.

The song-singer chants the legend in a monotonous, whining voice to the sound of a beating drum, while the assembled kobolds nod to the beat and listen.

The Legend of the Pork-Fleshed Ones

'It is six thousand moons of yesterday happening, six thousand moons since the killing of them. Out from the Heart-Tree went Yagr, bold-tooth Yagr, happily a-hunting, well-tooled warrior.'

The drum-beat begins.

'Into the wood place, into the shadow place, over the wet place, there ran he. Meat for the gathering, running by the shadow boughs, seeking for runners there, fast ran he. Saw he the stranger things, tall-walking stranger things, strangers in black and white, speaking a foreign tongue, vexed was he. Into the bracken dim, under the covering, hiding himself away, fast hid he. Under the hanging branch, loudly as angry crows, bickering twixt themselves, there stood they sullenly, fools to be.

'Turned they and walked away, bound for the holy place, bound for the hollow mound, bind we our tongues of it, bind we the thought of it, never to speak of it, silent we. We keep the word of old, we know the holy place, none may be finding it, none may

be walking there, even we. Yet went the stranger three, walking the boughs beneath, speaking their savage tongue, while Yagr followed them, wrathful he.

'Up to the mound they go, then make a magic there, bad dirty magic there, not of we. Back to the tree he goes, back to the people place, there to be fetching us, there to be warning us, summoning we. Came we all stealthily, never a broken leaf, never a rustling, each with his stones to throw, each with a spear to throw, numbered like fallen leaves, great were we.

'Screamed they to see us then, three that were caught and killed, magics to work no more, vengeful we. Took we the humming thing, took we the evil thing, tougher than bone or bark, sharp as the sharpest stone, yet did we sunder it, yet did we scatter it, broke, smote and battered it, buried the shards of it, glad to be rid of it, glad were we.

'Took we the three of them, three that had trodden there, trodden the holy place, done the forbidden thing, took them and butchered them, made us a meal of them, filled were we.'

The Shakkilikki remember the drow as the 'pork-fleshed ones' because when they were roasted and eaten, they tasted pork-like.

The Legend of the Coming of the Gnawers of Gnawers
This legend is told with a mournful tone, as it is painful for the Shakkilikki to be reminded of it.

'Before they came, before the air was broken, only two there were, runners to be hunted, gnawers to be fled, fled or killed by stealth. Runners bear the good meat. We chase the runners. Gnawers chase the runners, gnawers chase the people. Great are the gnawers that gnaw the earth, gnawing the soil and those who tread the soil. Gnawers live below the ground. Gnawers come from the ground, like the snake, like the worm. Some they take. It is well. The highest live, the lowest are eaten. It is well in that time.

'Then came the day. It is three hundred moons since the day.

'On the first day, the air broke. The air broke like the bark gnawed by insects. Holes in the air, holes that made us sick to look on. Through the holes we saw strangeness. From the holes there came terrible things, gnawers never before seen. There came things of fire and things of smoke, things of many sharp teeth and things without bones. We drove them away. Back to the holes they went. For twelve moons, twelve long moons, we endured.

'Then came the Mother of Desolation, the Gnawer with Many Mouths, the one some have said will be the end of us. She would not depart. She killed the great gnawers. She was swallowed in one gulp and tore the gnawer who had swallowed her, birthed herself in blood from his flank. Many went to face her, many were slain. In the dead place, the Ruin Place of Stones, she made her home, the lover of wreckage, the lover of that which has fallen. Into the darkness she passed, the darkness of two stone legs. We thought her gone, but she was not gone.

'Bold Ragi went to see. Eggs there were, he said. The mother slept. We knew what would come. We went to break the eggs, spill the blood before it was blood. Only one we broke. The roaring came. She made a meal of us. Since then they have torn down the trees, ravaged the land, slain the runners, slain the gnawers. They take the land from us.

'It ends in weeping. It ends in the old ache, the broken bone that does not heal.'

The Legend of the Ruin Place of Stones
'This is the oldest tale. This is the first tale. The moons that have passed since the tale was a yesterday are numbered as the fallen leaves, numbered as the pollen specks.

'There was a place where stone was rested on stone. It was a place where many dwelled. They were not us. Not runners nor gnawers were they. They were a people we do not remember. All their bones are gone. All the memories have gone. There is deep darkness only.

'They came from another place. They had their own legends. Their legends said they came from a door in the air. This we did not understand. They came here to be apart from others, to live according to their own law. This we understood. There was peace between our people.

'They understood not the trees, yet they understood high and low. They built high. They worked magics. They gave us the knowledge of things and we gave them the meat of the runners. They healed our wounded and we protected their herb-gatherers.

'We do not know why they are no more. We only know they are gone. Their stones fell from one another. The high was low once again. The stones sleep in peace.'

Location: The Sacred Mound

If they have heard the legend of the pork-fleshed ones, the Player Characters may be curious about the sacred place referred to. The kobolds refuse to speak of it, saying that it can only be spoken of when the legend is sung, and even then it cannot be spoken of at length. A Sense Motive check (DC 20) reveals that they are speaking of something close by; little glances and other bits of body language give this away.

The sacred mound is a low hill in a region of thin forest to the northwest of the ruined city (see map). As the legend says, the kobolds are protective of it and kill any who go there, even their own people. The taboo is that strong. If any of the Player Characters ever head in that direction, a party of five kobolds tails them and makes sure they do not trespass on holy ground. If they are irreverent enough to enter the mound and the kobolds see them do this, the kobolds do

not forgive them; from that point on, the kobolds harass and assault them at every opportunity.

Entrance: The opening into the side of the mound is a simple stone lintel like a Neolithic tomb.

Mound Interior: This is a hollow space that smells of old earth and leaf mould. It used to be the site of a permanent *gate* to Ashfar, through which the founders of the ruined city first came, eventually followed by the kobolds who were the ancestors of the Shakkilikki. Although the *gate* is long gone, it is possible to detect very faint traces of planar disturbance. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 20) correctly identifies this place as a former connecting point between the planes. A further Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 40) identifies the point where the plane would have connected: the jungles of Kandang.

The reason the kobolds have such reverence for the place is because it once represented home – where they came from. It also brings back memories of the dark times before they were paragon kobolds.

This is where the device to destroy Muzziomone was to be placed, because it was already slightly unstable. The three drow who had previously established a backup base on Blue Lethary intended to detonate their device here. By the timescale of the Material Plane, this was a little less than two weeks ago; by the timescale of Muzziomone, it was over five hundred years ago.

However, the drow severely underestimated the kobolds, who sensed that they were up to something unwholesome and slaughtered them in a surprise attack. The kobolds tore the device to pieces and scattered the fragments.

A Search check (DC 40) comes up with tiny pieces of metal and glass, the former severely corroded. It is next to impossible to identify these conclusively as part of a planar destruction cylinder.

Location: The Ruined City

Before you lies an overgrown wasteland of stone blocks and walkways, all that remains of a city. By the size of it, this place must once have been a centre of population to rival Xoth Sarandi. You can only guess at what power raised the immense cubic blocks of stone that now lie scattered like dice across the plain. It seems that the stones were once covered with carvings, but time and weather have worn the stones down so that it is now hard to see anything on their surfaces but the vaguest of shapes.

Three features stand out against the skyline. These are the crumbling walls of a fortress or temple of some kind, still partly intact; two great bodiless stone legs, broken below the knee; and a vast mass of uneven stone, perhaps the head of the crumbled statue.

The kobolds do not like to enter the city and do not accompany the Player Characters into it. They fear the Mother of Desolation.

The Stone Legs

Between the feet of the statue is an archway running down under the ruins. The rubble around the entrance suggests that something has dug out the formerly blocked passage.

At the bottom of the tunnel is an echoing vault where Kashtari Damakka lies. Three sirrush eggs stand nearby at the back of the chamber. Kashtari Damakka will defend them fiercely. If the Player Characters attempt to parley, she only agrees if she believes they are threats. Even then she is likely to attack them in mid-conversation if she can place herself between her eggs and the Player Characters; she relishes her solitude and dominion over this plane and is confident that she can destroy any interlopers.

She can tell the Player Characters the following:

- She hails from the plane of Rostaroc, a chaotic wilderness where gigantic beasts hunt one another and everything feeds on everything else. The endless game of predator and prey tired her and she yearned to be among weaker creatures whom she could dominate. The planequake opened rifts into other worlds and she took the opportunity to flee here.

- She does not know what this city used to be, nor does she know anything about the cause of the planequake.

Note: Kashtari Damakka is a very serious challenge. The Player Characters are unlikely to be able to beat her unless they recruit help from other factions, are exceptionally lucky or use brilliant tactics.

Like the other sirrush, she is no fool and will not fight to the death if she can help it. If reduced to less than 50 hit points, she pleads for her life and agrees to leave Muzziomone forever if the Player Characters can give her a way off the plane. This earns the Player Characters the eternal gratitude of the kobolds, who create a new legend to commemorate the heroes and may even allow them to enter the sacred place; after all, they are obviously the chosen ones delivering the kobold people from their doom, so maybe they are fit to tread upon holy ground.

The Crumbling Fane

This ruin was formerly the Fane of Akiaroso the Gold-Blooded, the place where the reclusive Kandang sorcerers who created the city would gather to study and practice magic. A Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check (DC 30) allows a character to recreate in his imagination how the place would have appeared before it collapsed. This allows him to find where the central sanctum would have been.

The Fane was a swirling off-centre cone looking rather like a lopsided ice cream. Anyone from Kandang instantly recognises the architectural style. Multiple curved passages led to a single central sanctum. A Player Character who locates and examines the stones that made up the walls of these passages and makes a successful Search check (DC 30) can follow the spiralling path and find the remains of the sanctum.

The Sanctum: On the face of it, this is an area of jumbled stone no different from the rest. Investigation of the area directly below the rubble (such as by ethereally passing through the stone) discovers a hollow space, the remains of a library sealed off by collapsed stone.

The walls of the library are made up of stone shelves with hundreds of scrolls stacked upon them. Seated here on stone thrones are three skeletons dressed in what were formerly the robes of Kandang magicians. These have mostly crumbled to dust, with only the golden metal threads with which they were embroidered remaining intact.

There is a fifteen-foot-thick barrier of rubble between the sanctum and the upper world. If the Player Characters can pass through it or clear it, they can enter the sanctum and examine the contents. Most of the scrolls dissolve into powder as soon as they are touched. However, a Search check (DC 20) locates a stash of five magical scrolls that are still intact. These were scribed with a caster level of 26th and contain the following spells: *clone*, *foresight*, *mage's disjunction*, *maximised meteor storm* and *prismatic sphere*.

The Scroll of Akarioso: One of the skeletons has a golden scroll case ornamented with lapis lazuli (value 12,000 gp) in its lap. Inside this is a scroll made from some unidentifiable bluish material much like plastic film.

The scroll, which has survived in perfect condition, describes for posterity how Akarioso and his followers came here from Kandang to practice their dangerous species-altering magic away from the supervision of their dragon overlords. They entered through a *gate* that they made permanent, covering it with an earthen mound to mark the spot. They were intent upon finding a magical means to create super-creatures, strains of perfect life that would be free from the defects of ordinary biology.

The scroll mentions that a group of tame kobolds followed them through the gate and settled in the small wood near the city. The sorcerers felt that the kobolds would be ideal test subjects and practiced their magic upon them. It took several generations for the effects to become manifest; fortunately the natural lifespans of kobolds are not long and they breed enthusiastically. It also helped that with the differing time flow, the sorcerers were able to 'fast-forward' the experiment simply by leaving the plane and waiting for a while, observing how the successive generations varied in abilities. Akarioso was pleased to note that the kobolds did indeed begin to show signs of abnormally enhanced ability.

The most recent entries describe how the kobolds seem to be chafing at their lesser status. They have acquired so much new Intelligence that they have begun to realise how far down they are in the pecking order. Akarioso fears there may be an uprising. He writes that he does not wish to unleash the potent forces contained within the Flask of Zepheth to terminate the experiment, but he will do so if the alternative is to lose the city.

Akarioso's Remains: As the chamber has never been looted, some powerful items remain here. The arch-sorcerer's magical rod still lies at his feet. This is a *rod of the epic spellcaster* (+10 insight bonus to Spellcraft checks when casting epic spells). Loose on his bony fingers are a *ring of epic protection +8* and a *ring of epic wizardry VII*.

His stone throne contains a secret compartment detectable with a Search check (DC 30). This has been protected with a *symbol of death*, triggered when the compartment is opened; a Fortitude save (DC 28) is allowed. Inside the compartment is the *flask of Zepheth*.

The *Flask of Zepheth*: This dark indigo bottle seems to be a simple glass object such as one might buy from a bazaar for a silver piece or two. When picked up it is oddly warm to the touch and seems to vibrate in one's hands. A very faint hum like that of distant bees emanates from it and it radiates an aura of strong Transmutation magic. Bound within the *flask* are from one to three ruin swarms (the swarms are actually in an extradimensional space similar to a *portable hole* in which there is no passage of time) that escape if the stopper on the *flask* is removed. A black geyser of insects comes from the *flask's* opening, the quiet hum turning into a roaring buzz.

Once freed, a swarm simply devastates all life in the surrounding area. It cannot be controlled or contained. That is why Akarioso saw it as an emergency measure; it could be relied on to destroy the rebellious kobolds, their spawn and their entire environment. The Games Master should adjust the number of swarms in the *flask* to provide a suitable challenge for the Player Characters. The swarms are CR 23, so one or two are about right at this stage.

Note for the Games Master: This area contains treasure without monsters, just as the lair of Kashtari Damakka contains a monster without any treasure. Some Games Masters object to providing treasure without there being a fight first; so if preferred, instead of a *symbol of death* inside the throne, the Games Master can have the *flask of Zepheth* shatter when the compartment is opened (releasing the ruin swarms) and place the rod and rings inside the throne instead.

Ruin Swarm: CR 23; Tiny vermin (swarm); HD 50d8+500; hp 725; Init +16; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft., fly 90 ft. (perfect); AC 30, touch 28, flatfooted 14; Base Atk +37; Grp —; Atk (5d6, swarm); Full Atk (5d6, swarm); Space/Reach 10 ft./0 ft.; SA blinding, distraction; SQ blindsense, fast healing 15, swarm traits, vermin traits; AL N; SV Fort +37, Ref +34, Will +22; Str 3, Dex 42, Con 30, Int—, Wis 23, Cha 32.

Blinding (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with a ruin swarm in its space must make a Fortitude save (DC 51) or be blinded for one round. The save DC is Dexterity-based.

Blindsense (Ex): The ruin swarm notices and locates creatures within 200 ft. Opponents still have 100% concealment against the swarm (but swarm attacks ignore concealment).

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature vulnerable to the swarm's damage that begins its turn with a swarm in its square is nauseated for one round; a Fortitude save (DC 45) negates the effect. Even with a successful save, spellcasting or concentrating on spells within the area of a swarm requires a Concentration check (DC 20 + spell level). Using skills requiring patience and concentration requires a Concentration check (DC 20). The save DC is Constitution-based.

Swarm Traits: A swarm has no clear front or back and no discernable anatomy, so it is not subject to critical hits or flanking. A swarm made up of Tiny creatures takes half damage from slashing and piercing weapons. Reducing a swarm to zero or fewer hit points causes the swarm to break up, though damage taken until that point does not degrade its ability to attack or resist attack. Swarms are never staggered or reduced to a dying state by damage. They cannot be tripped, grappled or bull rushed, nor can they grapple another. A swarm is immune to any spell or effect that targets a specific number of creatures (including single-target spells such as *disintegrate*), with the exception of mind-affecting effects if the swarm has an Intelligence score and a hive mind. A swarm takes a -10 penalty on saves against spells or effects that affect an area, such as grenade-like weapons or many Evocation spells. If the area effect attack does not allow a save, the swarm takes double damage instead. A swarm rendered unconscious by means of nonlethal damage becomes disorganized and dispersed. It does not reform until its hit points exceed its nonlethal damage.

Vermin Traits: A ruin swarm is immune to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns and morale effects). It also has darkvision (60-foot range).

The Stone Mass

The immense boulder close to the broken stone legs seems at first to be part of the statue. Closer investigation and a stone-related skill check such as a Profession (miner) check (DC 20) reveal that the stone is not the same as that of which the statue and the buildings were made. It radiates overwhelming Transmutation magic.

The stone is the cause of the kobolds' transformation into paragon creatures. Though it is now fallen and eroded, it was once the centrepiece of the city. Its effect is to transmute creatures of a given species who touch it into paragon sires – creatures who will produce young who are paragon versions of the creature. The sorcerers of Kandang considered it their crowning achievement.

This particular stone is attuned to the kobold species. These were ideal, as their Hit Dice were very low; they were thus easier to influence. A character who studies the stone mass carefully and succeeds at a Spellcraft check (DC 50) learns the basics of the epic spell *paragon stone*. He does not learn the spell itself, but learns that the spell is *possible* and gains a three-day head start on research towards reproducing it.

Paragon Stone

Paragon creatures occur naturally and can also sometimes be created by magic. This spell is used when magicians want to produce a whole line of paragon creatures, whether this is because they need them as troops, they want to improve the condition of the creatures or just because they enjoy playing God. The spell enchants a mass of stone, which must weigh at least a hundred tons and must come from a plane that is positive-energy dominant.

The enchanted stone must be attuned to a single given species of creature. Each creature of the given species who touches the stone has a flat 1% chance to be transformed into a paragon sire who will then breed paragon young if it breeds at all. A creature only gets one chance to be transformed.

Aftermath

The Player Characters have a tough job bringing any useful clues back from this adventure. The only information of relevance to the Assembly is the account of three drow who came here and were slaughtered – possibly the same three that were seen on Blue Lethary, if the Player Characters have worked out how the temporal distortion works – and the corroded fragments of the planar destruction cylinder.

If the Player Characters have already found a cylinder on Blue Lethary, then this at least tells the group that the drow have more than one of these devices and may somehow be linked to the planes' destruction.

The Firefalls of Torrendo

The third plane that seems an obvious target is that known as the Firefalls of Torrendo. This plane is spatially limited but is not an enclosed disc like the others. Instead, it is ring-shaped.

The ring is a sequence of rocky plateaus like an infinite staircase. The geometrical peculiarities of the plane mean that one can descend or ascend the 'steps' for a whole circuit of the ring and end up back where one started. This is illustrated by the eponymous Firefalls, which are rivers of burning alchemical mercury that constantly pour down the steps. This in itself is totally bizarre, as mercury does not ordinarily burn.

The mercury burns with white heat but remains dry, so the rivers slip past and over the steps without clinging to them, a quicksilver torrent as fast as a mountain stream. The actual falls are the points where the mercury pours over a rock ledge to the next level down. These would be astonishingly beautiful if it were not for the screams echoing from them.

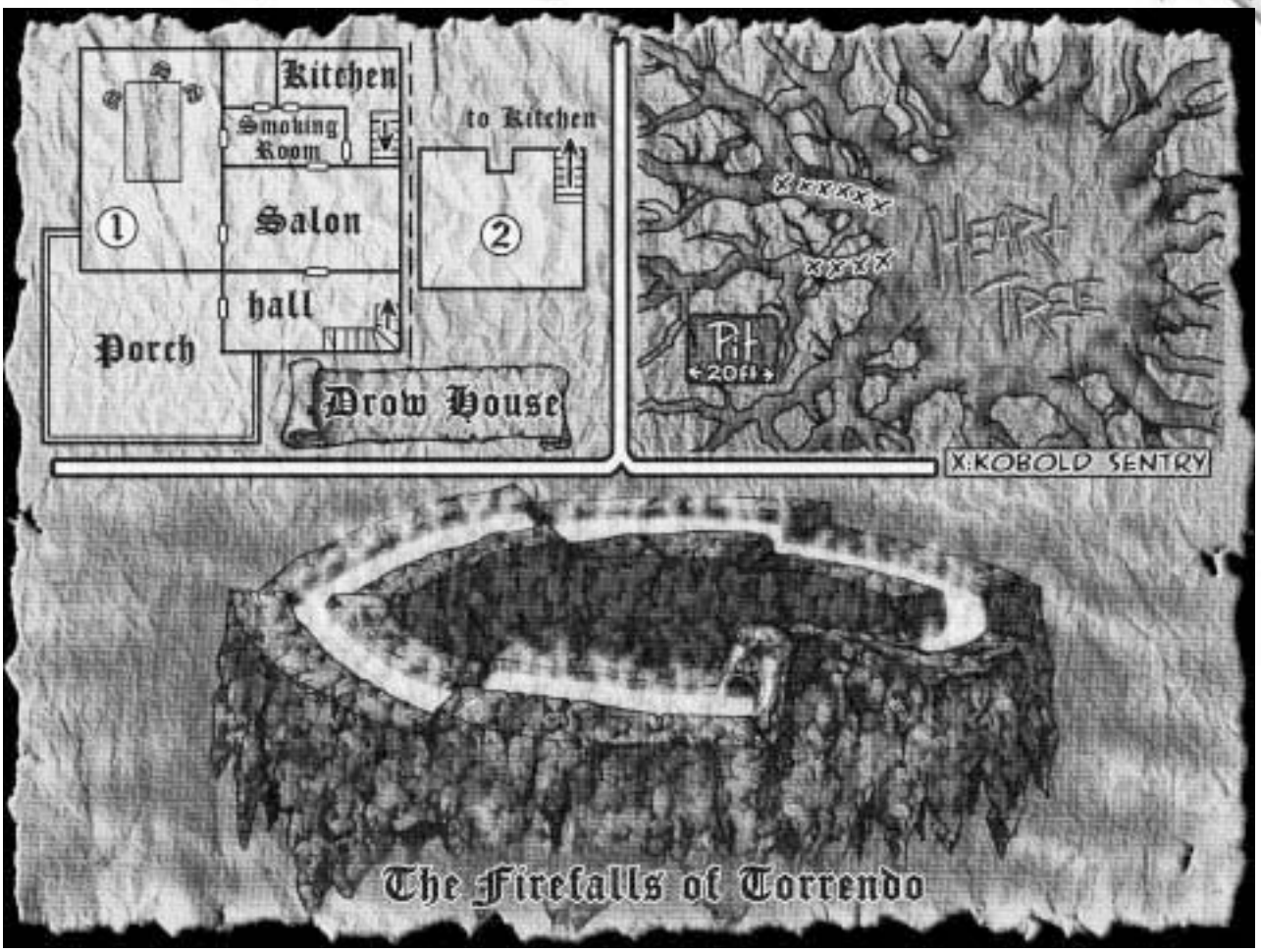
Mercury of the Philosophers

A plane as bizarre as this is bound to attract attention and indeed it has. Mercury from the Firefalls is a prized substance as it is identical with that found at the heart of a *quicksilver stone.* The denizens of this plane, undead beings of fire, do not take kindly to thieves who come to plunder their rivers of life. Trespassing here is grounds for immediate, summary, agonising death.

The burning mercury turns to useless white ash if it is removed from the plane in its liquid state. It must first be allowed to cool. A gallon of the mercury, cooled down, congeals into a piece of sooty rock the size of a cabbage, a typical *quicksilver stone.* A tiny amount of the mercury remains liquid and potent; this enables any arcane spellcaster to transmute base metals (iron and lead) into silver and gold.

A single *quicksilver stone* can turn up to 5,000 pounds of iron into silver or up to 1,000 pounds of lead into gold. However, the quicksilver becomes unstable once the *stone* is opened and loses its potency within 24 hours, so all transmutations must take place within that period.

The quicksilver of Torrendo found in the centre of the *stone* may also be put to another use. If mixed with any *cure* potion while the substance is still potent, it creates a special *oil of life* that acts as a *heal* spell for any creature to whom it is applied. The *oil of life* can restore 1d6 hit points lost to banefire and is the only substance in the multiverse that can do so (see the descriptions of the lavawights and the shape of fire, page 99).



Most scavengers content themselves to prowl the outer spaces of Torrendo looking for cooled-down splashes of spilled mercury they can take back and sell as *quicksilver stones.* Mercanes, the traders of the multiverse, are the most likely creatures to do this.

Legends of Immortality

The other force that draws people to this place is the legend that eternal life can be found here. Supposedly the rivers of alchemical mercury have the power to grant immortality, though the process is horrible to behold and far from reliable.

There are tales of men and women of exceptional willpower who have stood beneath the flaming falls and burned up their mortal flesh, remaining in the white-hot flow until all of their mortality was melted away like wax, falling off in cinders. It is said that a soul that is strong enough to *will* itself to remain alive while the flames devour its body will emerge renewed, never again to be harmed by fire, nor by the ravages of age.

If these legends are true, then the immortals have kept themselves well hidden, as nobody has ever admitted to having survived the fire. The failures, however, are known and feared. They still bathe, screaming, in the liquid metal, as if it will only take a few more minutes before the pain ends, only a few more…

These burning skeletal undead jealously defend their plane from intruders. They are lavawights; their overlord is a shape of fire that seems to have a different origin. It strolls through the flames quite undaunted, mocking the burning lavawights and encouraging them. The shape of fire is called Skaahn and is detailed below.

Planar Conditions

Torrendo has the following traits:

- Self-contained shape. The ring connects with itself.

Non-Player Character Group: The Lavawights

Unless they see a creature other than another lavawight or Skaahn approaching, the lavawights remain within the rivers of mercury, washing themselves with it and screaming, though the flame no longer harms them.

Lavawight: CR 23; Medium undead (fire); HD 32d12; hp 208; Init +12; Spd 60 ft.; AC 46, touch 18, flat-footed 38; Base Atk +16; Grp +37; Atk +40 melee (3d8+21 plus blazefire/19–20, claw); Full Atk +40 melee (3d8+21 plus blazefire/19-20, 2 claws) and +32 melee (2d6+10 plus blazefire, skull butt); SA blazefire, rend 6d8+31, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10/—, fiery hardness, fire subtype, heat aura, spell resistance 34, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +12, Ref +18, Will +24; Str 52, Dex 27, Con —, Int 10, Wis 22, Cha 28.

Skills & Feats: Jump +33, Knowledge (religion) +33, Listen +41, Search +35, Spot +41; Cleave, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (claw), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (claw).

Epic Feats: Blinding Speed (x2), Epic Weapon Focus (claw), Overwhelming Critical (claw).

Blazefire (Su): Living creatures taking damage from a lavawight's attack find themselves ignited with blazefire; they must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 35) or permanently lose four hit points. The opponent must continue to save every round for the next six rounds (seven rounds total) to avoid being permanently drained of four more hit points each round. Whenever its blazefire drains a creature's hit points, the lavawight heals the same amount of damage, gaining any excess as temporary hit points. These temporary hit points last a maximum of one hour. If an opponent is slain by blazefire, only blackened ash remains of the victim. Hit points lost to the blazefire never heal naturally and cannot be magically restored by normal means; they are gone for good. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Fiery Hardness (Ex): The lavawight's molten skin provides it with damage reduction of 10/—.

Fire Subtype: The lavawight is immune to fire and vulnerable to cold; it takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold, regardless of whether a save is allowed or whether the save is a success or failure.

Heat Aura (Su): A 10-foot-radius heat aura surrounds a lavawight. All creatures of the fire subtype within the field (including the lavawight) are treated as if having turn resistance +6 (if undead) and fast healing 10. Creatures subject to fire damage are dealt 2d10 points of fire damage each round they remain within the heat aura.

Rend (Ex): If the lavawight hits with both of its claws, it latches onto its opponent's body and tears its flesh. This attack automatically deals an additional 6d8+31 points of damage.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *dimension door* (DC 23), *fireball* (DC 22), *flame arrow, spell immunity (sleet storm*), *wall of fire*. Caster level is 22nd; save DCs are Charisma-based.

Location: The Weeping Face

The only part of the Firefalls that is not unworked rock is the Weeping Face, a grotesque grimacing form carved out of the rock. It is shaped like the head of a bald human with no lower jaw, contorted in pain. The rivers of mercury run in through the back of the head and flow out through the corners of its eyes and nostrils, giving the impression that the Face is weeping molten metal.

Two lavawights stand guard over the Face. The arch of the mouth, hidden behind the constantly falling mercury, leads to Skaahn's lair. Being incorporeal, Skaahn does not *need* a lair; he retires here because he sometimes wishes for solitude and because it is close to where he died.

The firefall at the mouth holds a secret: Skaahn's bones are hidden beneath the mercury there. A Spot check (DC 40) allows a character to notice them among the silver turbulence.

Non-Player Character: Skaahn

Skaahn is a flaming incorporeal skeleton with a cacophonous laugh, who drifts above the Firefalls and encourages visitors to the plane to 'Try your luck in the cleansing fires! Eternal life awaits the bold! Better to burn out than to fade away!'

Unlike the lavawights, Skaahn is not automatically hostile to intruders. He finds them amusing and is willing to talk to them so long as they are not boring. He has a cruel sense of humour. The Aerial Demons are greeted as kindred spirits if any of them are with the Player Characters. They have met Skaahn before, when they travelled through this plane.

Skaahn has a bargain to make. He is bound to this plane and craves to leave it. Until now there has been nobody who needed anything from him. Now that the Player Characters need his help (as he knows what has happened here recently and they do not), he tries to negotiate with them. Skaahn was the first creature to try and fail to burn away his mortality in the flames. His fate was different from that of the lavawights – they still occupy their charred bodies, but he is an incorporeal phantom, his silvered bones still lying beneath the firefall at the cave mouth. The lavawights serve him but they have no power to force a passage from Torrendo.

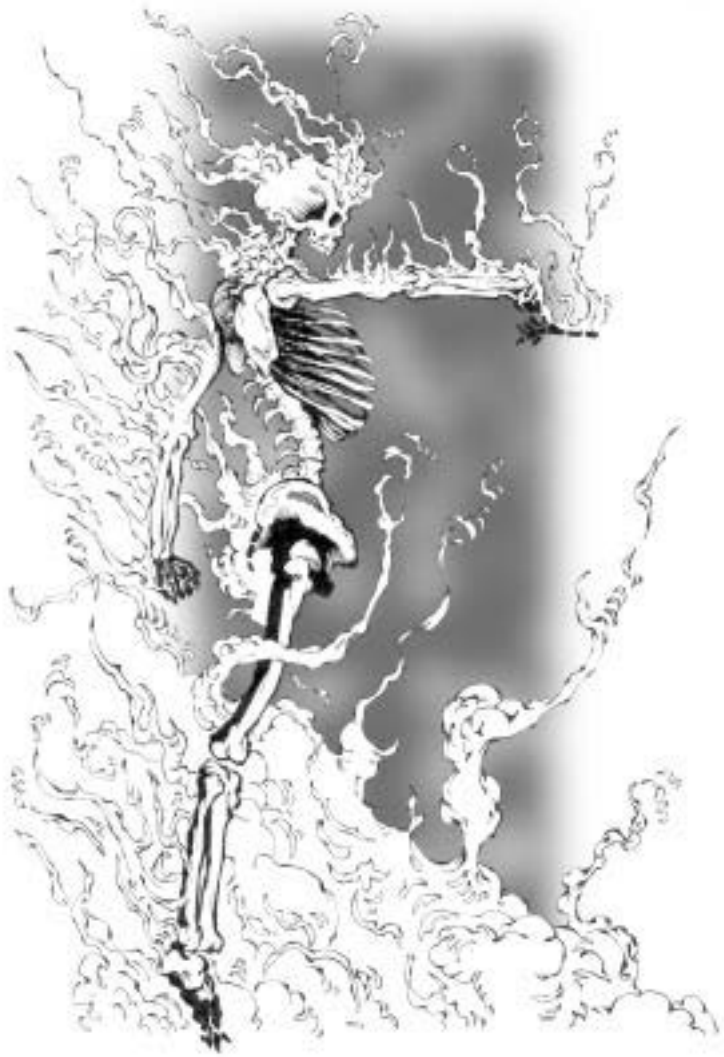
If his bones are removed from the plane, he will be able to leave, too. He will no longer be bound to them and will be free to burn and ravage as he pleases. If the Player Characters want his help, they have to free him from this prison. Skaahn wants his bones to be taken to the Material Plane, to Ashfar. Specifically, he wants them to be taken to a mountain in the north of Visk. He does not tell the Player Characters anything of use until they have carried out this service. If they prove recalcitrant, he tries to use his lavawights to intimidate them

A Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (religion) check (DC 30) informs the Player Characters that Skaahn is clearly trapped

here and that moving his bones off the plane will free him. Additionally, a Bardic Lore check (DC 40) unearths his true identity as the tyrant Uzbal Jin (see below).

Skaahn knows the following but does not reveal it until he is freed:

- No drow have ever come here. The plane was last visited by a mercane who hastily gathered some *quicksilver stones* and left.
- Skaahn has seen people complete the process of becoming immortal. It *can* be done.
- The people who successfully achieve immortality are mostly wizards, sorcerers, clerics and other magically-oriented characters. One person, however, stands out in his memory above all others because he was so calm and unafraid. Skaahn respects him for that, even as he despises him for his success. The man did not seem to be a wizard or cleric; in fact, he did not seem to be anything special at all. He was of average height, dressed in simple travellers' robes, with no distinguishing marks. When the flames had consumed his mortality, he turned to Skaahn and said 'All things have their place and all things have their purpose. Even you'. The next moment he was gone.



Refusing to help Skaahn first makes him annoyed and then makes him murderously angry. He calls any lavawights in the vicinity to his aid and attack the Player Characters. Skaahn is a powerful adversary (CR 26) and deals damage that is almost impossible to cure, so the Games Master should be careful with this encounter.

If the Player Characters free Skaahn, he does not attack them… yet. He does, however, go straight to the nearest settlement and announce his return. The result is terror, panic, mass death and the immediate creation of a small army of lavawights. These then lay waste to Visk, just as Uzbal Jin did all those years ago. Releasing Skaahn into the Material Plane is not an evil act in itself but it certainly opens the door for evil to run riot in the Player Characters' own world.

Skaahn's Real History

The creature known as Skaahn is actually Uzbal Jin, the legendary conqueror of Visk, who burned down a whole city eight hundred years ago when its inhabitants refused to surrender to him, and who mysteriously vanished from the history books after his empire was established.

After he had subjugated the continent, Uzbal Jin awoke one night in the grip of absolute terror, realising that no amount of military power or tribute from conquered nations would prevent old age from claiming him. He learned of the existence of an obscure plane where the 'rivers of life' were said to flow, where a man might become immortal if he were brave enough. Even the terrible Uzbal Jin was not iron-willed enough to pass the ordeal, and he now haunts the plane as a shape of fire, mocking those who, like him, sought eternal life.

After eight hundred years of exile, he yearns to return to Visk and become a conqueror once again, to see the smoke rise from the piled bodies of the slain. He may not have become an immortal human, but in death he has become something far more terrifying. None will stand before him now.

Skaahn, Shape of Fire: CR 26; Large undead (fire, incorporeal); HD 35d12; hp 227; Init +17; Spd fly 60 ft. (perfect); AC 48, touch 48, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +17; Grp —; Atk +25 melee

(2d6 plus blazefire, incorporeal touch); Full Atk +25 melee (2d6 plus blazefire, incorporeal touch); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA blazefire, create spawn, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10/epic, fire subtype, heat aura, incorporeal traits, spell resistance 36, turn resistance +6, undead traits; AL CE: SV Fort +13, Ref +20, Will +26; Str —, Dex 29, Con —, Int 17, Wis 25, Cha 31.

Skills & Feats: Diplomacy +48, Hide +47, Intimidate +48, Listen +45, Search +41, Sense Motive +45, Spot +45; Alertness, Blinding Speed, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Expertise, Great Fortitude, Improved Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spellcasting Harrier, Spring Attack, Superior Initiative.

Blazefire (Su): As lavawight, except that the Fortitude save (DC 37) and ten hit points per round are permanently drained.

Create Spawn (Su): Any humanoid slain by Skaahn becomes a lavawight in 1d4 rounds. Lavawights are under Skaahn's command and remain enslaved until its death. They do not possess any of the abilities they had in life.

Fire Subtype: Skaahn is immune to fire and vulnerable to cold; he takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold, regardless of whether a save is allowed or whether the save is a success or failure.

Heat Aura (Su): A 10-foot-radius heat aura surrounds Skaahn. All creatures of the fire subtype within the field (including Skaahn) are treated as if having turn resistance +6 (if undead) and fast healing 10. Creatures subject to fire damage are dealt 2d10 points of fire damage each round they remain within the heat aura.

Incorporeal Traits: Skaahn can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, magic weapons or magic, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. He can pass through solid objects at will, and his own attacks pass through armour. He always moves silently.

Spell-Like Abilities: 3/day – *fire storm* (DC 28), *incendiary cloud* (DC 28). Caster level is 24th; save DCs are Charisma-based.

Location: The Burning Rivers

The rivers are only around a foot deep and burn with an intense magical heat. They deal damage equivalent to burning lava: 2d6 points of damage per round of exposure, except in the case of total immersion, such as when a creature stands directly under the falling mercury, which deals 20d6 points of damage per round. Damage from the magma continues for 1d3 rounds after exposure ceases but this additional damage is only half of that dealt during actual contact; that is, 1d6 or 10d6 points per round.

The Firefalls themselves, where the burning silver fluid cascades over the rocks, have a strangely compelling effect. A living creature coming within ten feet of them is subjected to a *suggestion* effect which compels the creature to believe it is strong enough to brave the flames and achieve immortality. A Will save (DC 32) is needed to resist the effect. A creature who saves successfully is immune to the effect for 24 hours.

Event: Baptism of Fire?

One or more of the Player Characters may attempt to achieve immortality through the flames. If they have members of other factions with them, then these may crave eternal life, especially the power-hungry Court of Jasmeera or the idealistic, reckless Threnody in Velvet.

In case anyone is crazy enough to attempt it, the transformation process works as follows. The candidate for immortality must allow himself to be burned to zero hit points by the flaming mercury. He can do this by lying in the flow but it is quicker to stand beneath the fall (which deals 20d6 damage per round, as noted above). He can have taken damage from other sources, so long as it is the mercury that takes him to zero hit points.

At this stage he must make a Will save (DC 40). If the save fails, he continues to lose hit points from fire damage until he dies at –10 hit points. A creature who dies from this fire damage arises as a lavawight 1d4 rounds later.

If the save is successful, the character takes no further hit point damage from the flames. Instead he suffers Constitution drain at the rate of 1d6 points per round. When he reaches one point of Constitution, the character must make a second Will save (DC 60). If he fails, the last point of Constitution is lost and he dies. Healing magic only serves to slow the process down. The candidate *must* have his body burned if he is to arise again as an immortal.

A successful save signals the beginning of his transformation into an immortal being. The character gains the fire subtype; the flames no longer hurt him and he begins to heal damage at the normal rate. His body no longer ages. He gains the bonuses from aging but none of the penalties. He can still be killed but he cannot die from aging, nor can he be magically aged.

Aftermath

The Player Characters can learn only this from their trip to the Firefalls: it does not appear that Torrendo is a target. Whether this is because the place is so inherently dangerous or because the enemy has some other means of achieving his goal is still a mystery.

Seeds of Destruction, Part 1 – The Ring

Summary: The Player Characters, with or without the assistance of members of the other factions, are charged to seek out legendary artefacts with astounding powers of destruction. One of these artefacts may be the cause of the collapsing planes. The more information can be relayed back to the assembled minds, the faster the source of this destruction can be found.

Investigating the Dangerous Artefacts

The second part of the investigative quest deals with the search for the means by which the adversary is destroying the planes. Three artefacts with powers that might achieve this have been mentioned. The only thing to do is to track them down. If one of them is being used to annihilate the planes, following the history of the artefact may lead to the perpetrator.

The Ebon Ring of the Carnifex

Where to Start: Both Bodiless Ao and Jasmeera have mentioned the Ebon Ring. Approaching either one is the obvious way to find out where to start looking. If either's faction is currently Unfriendly or Hostile to the Player Characters, it gives no information or only provides a few unhelpful facts.

Researching the item independently with standard Bardic Lore checks and the like uncovers a few basic pieces of information:

The Carnifex was an abomination that should never have existed. The story of its origin is misted by time. In a pantheon now forgotten, the principal god was betrayed by his brother and murdered. His wife restored him to life – or a semblance of life – and attempted to conceive a child from him who would grow to avenge his father. After the child was conceived, the dead god gave a hideous cry and fell to pieces.

The child that the goddess delivered was a horror like a mummified foetus, dead like its father and yet imbued with the powers of a demigod. The horrified gods of the pantheon cast the thing known as the Carnifex into the Negative Plane, deafening themselves to its wails and exiling it forever.

The sages who chronicle such things call a being of this kind an atropal. The Carnifex built a floating fortress like an asteroid clustered with turrets and barbed war-towers, in whose heart it brooded darkly on its own loathing for all life. It ruled there for many centuries, forging the Ebon Ring as an instrument of its power and subjugating whole civilisations to its perverse will.

In time it was destroyed, as all things are. None now remember how or by whom, but there is a whisper of legend that it was the Carnifex's own mother who finally destroyed her child. The ruins of its colossal fortress are still believed to drift among the detritus of the Negative Plane.

A good Bardic Lore check (DC 30) gives the following additional information:

According to one story, the Carnifex used the Ebon Ring to shatter a whole world. The realm was called Emacia and was the place where its parents' pantheon was worshipped. This was an act of vengeance for the Carnifex's exile.

An exceptional Bardic Lore check (DC 40) gives the following bonus information:

In causing the destruction of Emacia, the Carnifex overextended its power. Even it could not contain such an awesome manifestation of destructive magic. The destruction of Emacia caused a massive magical backlash which devastated the Carnifex's fortress and left it stunned, unable to defend itself properly. While it was reeling, its mother was able to overpower and slay it.

Bodiless Ao's Story

'Ah yes. The Ebon Ring. I remember learning of it at my mother's knee. Now, what happened to it? Let me think. Ah yes. It was bitten off by a landshark. Tragic business. Poor mother. But, ah! The ring. You want to know about that.

'Well, they do say it was able to create a vortex, a vortex of negative energy like a great hurricane, sucking life and light and all those horrible things right into the Negative Plane itself. As you might imagine, quite a few of the undead sort rather liked the sound of that. We like negative energy, you see. Gives us pep. Soothes the arthritis. Keeps you on the go.

'Anyway, the story was that a lich lady, Azrique Malfaisance (charming girl, excellent posture) discovered the ring floating among some rather odd rubble on the Negative Plane. This was, what, a few hundred years back? Word got around in the

circles we all frequent and all of us were jolly excited. However, no sooner does poor old Azrique discover the ebon ring than her own right-hand girl, a lassie they call the Baneliness, makes off with it. Shocking to-do.

'The last anyone heard, the Baneliness had set herself up a power base somewhere and not told anyone where it was, while Azrique is now forced to practice a rather more mediocre and less ambitious brand of evil on account of not *having a legendary artefact of devastating power. I imagine she's quite sore about it. Serves her right. She stole my spoons once. Anyhow, nobody but Azrique and the Baneliness ever saw the ruddy ring, so for all we know they were in cahoots and just making the whole story up.*

'Would you care for a dead otter on a stick before you leave? No? Don't blame you.'

Jasmeera's Story

'My experience with the Ebon Ring of the Carnifex is not extensive but I shall gladly share it with you if it helps our mutual struggle. I have never seen the Ebon Ring but I have been assured that it exists; and I have had it described to me in exacting detail. You see, someone once offered to sell it to me.

'It transpired a mere three years ago. The emissary was one of the undead, a vampire, who rode a stallion maned with blue fire. He came to the Shadowlands, he said, from a realm where a mad queen was holding court. She had become utterly crazed with power. He did not say exactly how. Apparently, the plane itself had begun to crumble, on account of the queen's use of the ring to abuse reality. Her undead subjects were on the point of rebellion but the power of the Ebon Ring made them fearful. So long as she wielded it, they could not rise against her.

'The vampire claimed he was in the mad queen's circle of close advisors and could gain possession of the ring easily. If I wished to buy it from him, he would deliver it. The asking price was, as I recall, ten million pieces of gold, or magical services to a similar value. All very vulgar.

'I inquired as to his reason for selling it to me, rather than keeping it for himself. He replied that once I became the wielder, the mad queen's power would dissipate. I remember pressing him on this, as it seemed so strange to me: why sell it? He admitted that to break the mad queen's power, it was not enough merely to take the ring from her. It had to be taken up by a new wielder. Naturally, I asked 'Why me?' and his response was most curious: 'Because you are alive.'

'I did not take the gentleman up on his offer. It seemed to have a little too much of the cheap confidence trick about it. Now that I come to think upon it, he left a method by which he could be contacted; an ingenious little tablet of pearl, which would magically alert him to my interest if I broke it in two.

'Would you care to accompany me to the Chateau of Lambent Flame? I can look for the pearl tablet for you. I am sure I still have it somewhere. The Cold Maid of Sethalane can speak for me while I am gone.'

If the Player Characters take Jasmeera up on her offer, she gives them hospitality in her chateau for a day and a night while she searches for the tablet. Breaking the tablet sends a message to Duke Hessamon, the vampire Jasmeera spoke of, who promptly appears. See Event: Contact with Duke Hessamon, below for details.

Even though her assistance helps the whole group, Jasmeera still holds the Player Characters in her debt for this 'favour'. She wants the favour repaid sometime soon.

Information: The Truth about the Ring

Bodiless Ao and Jasmeera are both telling the truth. Azrique did discover the ring of the Carnifex and the Baneliness did steal it from her. This caused a massive and unending feud between the two undead, which some commentators call the Lich War. The Baneliness used the power of the Ebon Ring to fortify her stronghold on the Crumbling Marches, a desolate plane of dust and shadows, while Azrique assembled an undead army of her own to lay siege to her former lieutenant in her own plane, the Bower of Blight.

What most observers do *not* know is that the Baneliness is Azrique's own daughter, who once followed her mother loyally into undeath and has now betrayed her. The blood of sorcery runs strong in Azrique's line.

The Ebon Ring has driven the Baneliness completely insane. Many of her closest allies are now ready to turn against her. All agree that the Ebon Ring cannot be borne by any one undead, as it makes them far too powerful and destroys their sanity at the same time. Azrique will be just as bad an overlord as the Baneliness once the Ebon Ring eats her mind away.

The only answer is for the Ebon Ring to be placed into the hands of a non-undead creature who is powerful enough to keep it safe. A plot was hatched to steal the Ebon Ring and sell it to a new owner, but since nobody was willing to buy it, this came to nothing.

Azrique's attack on Arkossa, the Huntsmen's home, was nothing *personal*. She just needed more dead bodies to bring back to the Bower of Blight and further bulk out her army.

Beginning the Adventure

There are two sides in the Lich War and thus two ways into this adventure. The Player Characters can approach Azrique and help her to overcome the Baneliness, or they can talk to one of the traitors on the Baneliness' side and enter the conflict that way.

Event: Chasing Azrique

The name 'Azrique Malfaisance' is familiar. A Bardic Lore or Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 25) produces the following information:

Azrique Malfaisance was last heard of very recently. Hygrave's Huntsmen were pursuing her after she had sent a pestilence against their world, Arkossa. They had tracked her down to a sub-plane of her own when the planequake struck and flung them far from their quarry. The Huntsmen still crave revenge against Azrique. They had put this aside with the greater danger of the planequake facing them, but if they learn that the two may be connected they become desperate to pick up the trail again.

The Huntsmen are convinced Azrique is the cause of the planequake. They think it is suspiciously convenient that the planequake flung them away from Azrique's very door just as the Huntsmen were about to break in on her. Arkossa was destroyed and she was a known enemy of that world, what with the pestilences and blights she sent against them. As far as they are concerned, all fingers point to her as the likely cause of the planar destruction.

Talking to the Huntsmen is the best way to get a lead on Azrique. They were the last to see her. With their help, the Player Characters should be able to locate the astral gateway into Azrique's own sub-plane, the Bower of Blight. The Huntsmen will want to accompany the Player Characters if possible, sending at least one of their number along to make sure Azrique pays for her crimes. They cannot all leave, as they are now sworn to protect the Assembly.

Event: Contact with Duke Hessamon

This event takes place if the Player Characters use Jasmeera's pearl tablet to contact the duke:

The pearl tablet breaks with a neat snap. Nothing happens. It occurs to you that three years have passed since this object was given to Jasmeera. Perhaps the owner has died or been imprisoned.

If the Player Characters wait a little longer, Duke Hessamon arrives:

With a shimmer of shifting realities, a pale humanoid appears before you. His eyes are like glass filled with blood, lit from behind. The armour he wears is dull black and covered with absurd, impractical spikes curving to needle-fine points. He looks at you with fury.

Hessamon was not expecting the Player Characters, only Jasmeera. His first thought is that they have merely stolen the tablet. If they can calm him down and talk to him rationally, he explains the situation as it stands now:

'She's worse than ever. I think it's the Ring doing it, eating away at her mind. We hardly ever see her anymore. She comes out of her chambers to give orders once a week. Sometimes she is seen walking the battlements, calling black lightning out of the sky and laughing. It has done something to the plane, something like a wasting disease. Objects just fall apart into dust, as if they were tired of being real. Holes appear in reality, not rifts like those of the planequake but hollows where solid matter used to be. We call the place the Crumbling Marches now, because that's what it's doing. I wouldn't be surprised if she had destroyed other worlds already, just for practice.

'Some of the nightwalkers have scouted the Bower of Blight. They say that Azrique is ready to move against us, and her attack will come any day now. Many of us have spoken of changing sides but nobody has the nerve to do it. Understand

that I am risking destruction just by talking to you! She becomes more insane each day, like a child that breaks toys in a fit of anger…

'The time when we could have stolen the Ring ourselves is long past. You have to destroy her and destroy the Ring, too. The Ring cannot be allowed to push us into a futile war with Azrique Malfaisance. I can get you inside the fortress but no further than that. You will have to avoid the sentries and make your way into the Baneliness' private chambers. Your guess is as good as mine as to what is in there. None of us have seen inside her rooms in years. Only her three favourites get to visit her.

'I cannot promise you any reward for this, other than such petty things as peace, security and the ongoing stability of the planes. I hope this will be enough.'

If the Player Characters agree to this, Duke Hessamon takes them to the Crumbling Marches by *plane shift* and transports them to the lower plateau of the Fortress of Ten Thousand Steps (see below). He explains that the Baneliness has altered reality within the fortress, presumably through the power of the Ebon Ring, so that *teleportation* in and out is impossible. He then gives them a full briefing (see below).

Hessamon can provide the following additional information, if the Player Characters think to ask:

- The three favourites he mentioned are Lord Skraith, the commander-in-chief of the vampires, who oversees the transformations; Mrs. Persimmon, the Baneliness's confidant and nurse, who seems to be an ordinary human being; and Mortec Chau, a mystic who walks the planes, who seems to have some power to calm the Baneliness down when she is in a fit of madness.

- Duke Hessamon's rank is only that of 'sentry vampire', despite his title. Truly loyal and devoted vampires become 'elect'. The elect vampires are put through a transformation process; those who succeed acquire the power to transform into a new shape. Those who fail are never seen again.

Location: The Bower of Blight

The skies churn with black and grey clouds which move more swiftly than clouds should, swelling and swirling like ink emptied into a cistern. Spread out before you to the limits of your vision is a blasted heath, withered and lifeless save for a few tufts of tough grass. It is dotted all over with tents, bleached white pavilions and large marquees. In a cordoned area is a group of what can only be siege engines. They are catapults built to elephantine scale, decorated crudely with skulls stuck on spikes.

There are hundreds of pale bodies on the heath, many of them lying motionless or slumped against objects. For a moment, it seems you are looking at a battlefield in the aftermath of slaughter, until you see them moving. This is an army of the undead. Never before have you seen so many gathered in one place. There must be hundreds of thousands of them.

The stench of the place reaches you. It is indescribable. Thousands upon thousands of bodies, decomposing in one place, are not something any sane creature should have to smell. The miasma in the air is so strong you can almost see it. Along with the reek of rot, you smell a sickly sweet perfume, as if someone has stuffed a handful of resinous incense into the belly of a rotten sheep.

This is Azrique Malfaisance's army, with which she intends to lay siege to the Baneliness and reclaim the Ebon Ring. At the appointed time, Azrique plans to open a *gate* to the Crumbling Marches and storm her daughter's keep.

Those of her troops who have minds are wary of the power of the Ebon Ring; Azrique, in her heart of hearts, is fearful of it herself. She knows that it has destroyed worlds before. It is just possible that the Baneliness might do what the Carnifex did before her, and devastate both her enemies and herself.

Planar Conditions

The Bower of Blight is eternally in half-light. Vampires can move freely in the open. It has no sun, just a flat grey sky behind the swirling clouds. It has the following traits:

- Finite shape. The Bower is a broad island of rock and scrub five hundred miles across, floating under a turbulent sky.

- Minor negative-aligned. Living creatures are dealt 1d6 points of damage per round. At zero hit points or lower, they crumble into ash. The *death ward* spell protects a traveller from the damage.

Non-Player Character Group: Azrique's Army

Azrique is lawful herself and has chosen her military commanders from the lawful undead, as they understand hierarchy and discipline. By contrast, the Baneliness – who rules by the power of the Ebon Ring – has raked together an army of chaotic undead, either terrorised or seduced into fighting for her.

The field is divided up into battalions, each of which has one overall commander, three lieutenants and between five and ten sergeants who each command a brigade of lesser

undead. The commanders are almost always lawfully-aligned vampire necromancers or mummy lords, the lieutenants vampire spawn or mummies and the common troops zombies or skeletons.

The battalions are grouped into ten regiments, with between fifteen and twenty battalions in each. A war-banner flies in the centre of each regimental district. The regiments are headed by *hunefers*, Azrique's loyal war-chiefs. Each of them has the title of Bonewarden. Each hunefer dwells in a distinctive turret-like tent in the centre of his regiment. He is attended by two assistants, each of which is a dust-created mummy with 18 Hit Dice (see below).

A regiment contains either vampire or mummy members, never both. There is a rivalry between the vampires, called 'snappers' by their rivals, and the mummies who are similarly called 'dusties' by the vampire troops. The vampires have the west side of the field, while the mummies have the east side. The hunefers, however, are universally respected.

At the start of each 'day', Azrique summons her ten Bonewardens to give them their orders. A Player Character who watches the army camp from a safe place can watch the Bonewardens leave their tents and proceed to Azrique's central marquee. The meeting lasts up to an hour, during which time their regimental command tents are empty.

The emblem of each regiment is embroidered in silver on a billowing black silk war-banner. The vampire regiments are Raven Skull, Open Wound, Bleak Wolf, Trodden Viper and Chilling Flame. The mummy regiments are Black Lotus, All-Seeing Eye, Crowned Vulture, Broken Column and Stalking Jackal.

Hunefer Bonewarden: CR 25; Medium undead; 50d12+3; hp 603; Init +16; Spd 100 ft.; AC 52, touch 32, flat-footed 40; Base Atk +25; Grp +43; Atk +44 melee (3d6+18/19–20 plus hunefer rot, slam); Full Atk +44 melee (3d6+18/19–20 plus hunefer rot, 2 slams); SA despair, hunefer rot, spell-like abilities; SQ blindsight 300 ft., damage reduction 10/—, fast healing 30, spell resistance 37, undead traits, vulnerability to fire; AL LE; SV Fort +18, Ref +30, Will +41; Str 47, Dex 35, Con —, Int 18, Wis 38, Cha 36.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +66, Jump +46, Knowledge (religion) +57, Knowledge (the planes) +57, Listen +67, Search +57, Sense Motive +67, Spellcraft +57, Spot +67; Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Devastating Critical (slam), Dodge, Expertise, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (slam), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Overwhelming Critical (slam), Power Attack, Spell Stowaway *(greater teleport*), Toughness, Weapon Focus (slam).

Despair (Su): The mere sight of a hunefer requires viewers to succeed at a Will save (DC 48) or be paralysed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Regardless of the outcome of the save, a subject is not vulnerable again to that hunefer's despair ability for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Hunefer Rot (Su): Supernatural disease: slam, Fortitude save (DC 35), incubation period instantaneous; damage 1d6 temporary Constitution. Unlike normal diseases, hunefer rot requires a victim to make a successful save every round or be dealt another 1d6 points of temporary Constitution damage. The rot continues until the victim reaches zero Constitution (and dies) or receives a *remove disease* spell or similar magic. An afflicted creature who dies shrivels away into sand. If the remains are not treated with *remove disease*, on the third round the dust swirls and forms a mummy with 18 Hit Dice, using the dead foe's equipment and under the hunefer's command.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *chain lightning* (DC 29), *displacement* (DC 26), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport*, *haste*, *knock*, *passwall*, *scrying* (DC 27), *true seeing*, *unholy aura* (DC 31), *weird* (DC 32); 1/day – *ruin* (epic spell). Caster level is 27th ; the save DC is Charisma-based.

Bonewarden's Assistant, Mummy: CR 18; Large Undead; HD 18d12+3; hp 120; Init -1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 20, touch 8, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +9; Grp +24; Atk +20 melee (1d8+16 plus mummy rot, slam); Full Atk +20 melee (1d8+16 plus mummy rot, slam); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA despair, mummy rot; SQ damage reduction 5/—, darkvision 60 ft., undead traits, vulnerability to fire; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +13; Str 32, Dex 8, Con —, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills & Feats: Hide -5, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Spot +9; Alertness, Blind-Fight, Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (slam).

Despair (Su): Viewers must succeed at a Will save (DC 21) or be paralysed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Regardless of the outcome of the save, a subject is not vulnerable again to that assistant's despair ability for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Mummy Rot (Su): Supernatural disease: slam, Fortitude save (DC 21), incubation period one minute; damage 1d6 Constitution and 1d6 Charisma. The save DC is Charisma-based. Unlike normal diseases, mummy rot continues until the victim reaches zero Constitution (and dies) or is cured as described below. A character attempting to cast any Conjuration (healing) spell on a creature afflicted with mummy rot must succeed on a caster level check (DC 20) or the spell has no effect on the afflicted character. To

eliminate mummy rot, the curse must first be broken with *break enchantment* or *remove curse* – requiring a caster level check (DC 20) for either spell – after which a caster level check is no longer necessary to cast healing spells on the victim and the mummy rot can be magically cured as any normal disease. An afflicted creature who dies of mummy rot shrivels away into sand and dust that blow away into nothing at the first wind.

Event: Down Among the Dead Men

One way or another, the Player Characters are going to have to reach Azrique. There are several possible ways in which this could happen.

A Pile of Mangled Corpses: If the Player Characters head down to the army to introduce themselves or any creature in the ranks of the army sees the Player Characters, the undead troops lurch to attack without asking questions. Anything not undead here is just meat to be torn.

Failure to bring the Player Characters down in a few rounds attracts the attention of the brigade's sergeant, who in turn calls for the battalion's commander if the Player Characters are still fighting. The Player Characters are able to carve their way through a vast number of low-level undead before the regiment's Bonewarden arrives and calls them off.

The Bonewarden is not stupid and regards any creatures willing to stand their ground against an army with a certain respect. He demands to know what the Player Characters are doing here:

'*Why are the living treading these dead lands, uninvited and unwelcome, in the dominions of our gracious Queen? This army will stay its hand for the moment, while you give an account of yourselves. Speak well, for if you buckle now, we shall strip off your useless flesh and make your bones into furniture for our command tent.*'

It is up to the Player Characters to respond well. Depending on their responses, the Bonewarden either laughs and attacks (backed up by his assistants) or nods, leaves his assistants to watch the Player Characters and goes to tell Azrique what has happened. The Player Characters are then summoned to the central tent.

Straight to the Top: The Player Characters can try to bypass the thousands of undead (by magic or stealth) and go straight to Azrique's tent. Depending on their timing, Azrique is either alone except for Malvan (who is *always* lurking in the shadows) or in the company of her Bonewardens.

Attacking Azrique in the midst of her armies is suicidal. If the Bonewardens are present, she croaks out an order to seize the Player Characters; faced by twelve creatures with Challenge Ratings over 25, the Player Characters are not likely to survive. If only Malvan is present, she parleys with the Player Characters long enough for him to get into position, after which he kills them one by one if he can.

Location: The Command Tent

This place is a cavern of black silk hanging in rags and tatters from the walls and canopy. Its owner has placed braziers in a double row from the door to a central raised area. These have been doctored with some sort of chemical or magic, as they hiss and burn blue with scarlet smoke. The shadows to either side flicker, now lightening, now darkening.

In the central area, where a pillar-like tent pole holds up the sagging fabric, is a seat of some foul black substance, glossy as oil, that bulges and quivers as if alive. Seated on this is a skeletal creature, its grey hair still clinging to its skull, its bare chin resting on its bony knuckles. Above and behind it, fixed to the tent pole, is a mirror whose frame seems molten and misshapen.

Azrique uses the mirror to *scry* in, to find out what her accursed daughter is planning.

Behind her in the shadows, Malvan the gloom is waiting, ready to strike down any creature who enters unbidden or endangers the existence of his mistress.

Azrique Malfaisance, Lich Queen, Female Lich Sor23: CR 25; Medium undead; HD 23d12; hp 149; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 34, touch 17, flat-footed 33; Base Atk +12; Grp +12; Atk +12 melee (1d8+5 negative energy (Will save half) plus paralysis, touch) or *rod of besiegement* +15 melee (1d6+3); Full Atk +12 melee (1d8+5 negative energy (Will save half) plus paralysis, touch) or +15/+10 melee (1d6+3, *rod of besiegement*); SA fear aura, paralysing touch, spells; SQ +4 turn resistance, damage reduction 15/bludgeoning and magic, immunity to cold, electrical damage, mind-affecting attacks and *polymorph*, spell resistance 40; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +14; Str 10, Dex 12, Con —, Int 17, Wis 12, Cha 22.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +32, Concentration +35, Craft (jewellery) +29, Decipher Script +16, Diplomacy +19, Hide +9, Knowledge (arcana) +29, Knowledge (the planes) +16, Listen +9, Profession (military commander) +27, Search +11, Sense Motive +22, Spellcraft +42, Spot +9; Empower Spell, Epic Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Epic Spellcasting, Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (Necromancy), Greater Spell Penetration, Maximise Spell, Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Necromancy), Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Penetration.

Damage: Azrique has a touch attack that uses negative energy to deal 1d8+5 points of damage to living creatures; a Will save (DC 27) halves the damage. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Fear Aura (Su): Azrique is shrouded in a dreadful aura of death and evil. Creatures with fewer than five Hit Dice in a 60-foot radius who look at her must succeed on a Will save (DC 27) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell from a 23rd level sorcerer. A creature who successfully saves cannot be affected again by Azrique's aura for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Paralysing Touch (Su): Any living creature Azrique hits with her touch attack must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 27) or be permanently paralysed. *Remove paralysis* or any spell that can remove a curse can free the victim but the effect cannot be dispelled. Anyone paralysed by Azrique seems dead, though a Spot check (DC 20) or a Heal check (DC 15) reveals that the victim is still alive. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Spells known (6/8/8/7/7/7/7/6/6/6, save DC 16 + spell level): 0th – *arcane mark, detect magic, mage hand, message, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st – *alarm, chill touch, detect undead, identify, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, shield, true strike;* 2nd – *acid arrow, blindness/deafness, command undead, detect thoughts, fox's cunning, see invisibility;* 3rd – *dispel magic, fly, halt undead, lightning bolt, nondetection, ray of exhaustion, vampiric touch;* 4th – *animate dead, black tentacles, contagion, enervation, fear, scrying, stoneskin;* 5th – *cloudkill, dismissal, mage's private sanctum, magic jar, mind fog, teleport, waves of fatigue;* 6th – *analyse dweomer, chain lightning, circle of death, create undead, globe of invulnerability, greater dispel magic;* 7th – *control undead, control weather, finger of death, greater scrying, spell turning, waves of exhaustion;* 8th – *create greater undead, greater planar binding, horrid wilting, maze, protection from spells, symbol of death;* 9th – *energy drain, gate, mage's disjunction, teleportation circle, time stop, wail of the banshee.*

Epic spells known (2, save DC 26): animus blast, epic repulsion.

Equipment & Treasure: Bracers of epic armour +12, mantle of epic spell resistance, ring of epic protection +6, rod of besiegement, rod of excellent magic, teeth of the plague ass (3).

Malvan, Male Gloom: CR 25; Medium monstrous humanoid; HD 25d8+225; hp 337; Init +26; Spd 30 ft.; AC 40, touch 40, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +25; Grp +36; Atk +54 melee (1d4+21/17–20, *+10 keen dagger of human dread*); Full Atk +54/+49/+44/+39 melee (1d4+21/17–20, *+10 keen dagger of human dread*); SA fear gaze, sneak attack +13d6; SQ blindsight 60 ft., damage reduction 10/epic, opportunist, quiescence, spell resistance 35, spell-like abilities; AL LE; SV Fort +17, Ref +32, Will +21; Str 32, Dex 46, Con 29, Int 26, Wis 25, Cha 30.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +38, Climb +39, Hide +46, Intimidate +38, Jump +39, Listen +35, Move Silently +66, Spot +35, Survival +35, Tumble +46; Dodge, Improved Initiative, Improved Critical (dagger), Mobility, Sneak Attack of Opportunity, Spring Attack, Superior Initiative, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (dagger).

Fear Gaze (Su): Viewing Malvan's face inspires terror. Creatures who meet his gaze must succeed at a Will save (DC 32) or suffer the effects of a *fear* spell as cast by a 20th level caster. The DC is Charisma-based.

Opportunist (Ex): This ability functions in the same way as the rogue class feature of the same name.

Quiescence (Su): Malvan is constantly silent as per the *silence* spell, although the area does not extend beyond him. This quality gives him a +20 racial bonus on Move Silently checks, although it is still possible for Malvan to create noise, such as by bumping into something that scrapes on the floor or by sounding a chime. He can lower this effect at will.

Sneak Attack (Ex): Malvan is able to sneak attack as a 25th level rogue, dealing 13d6 extra points of damage.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *shadow walk* (DC 26); 3/day – *true strike*. Caster level is 20th; save DC is Charisma-based.

Equipment & Treasure: +10 keen dagger of human dread (in the hands of anyone but Malvan or another gloom, this functions as a *+5 keen dagger*), *talisman of life shielding*.

Malvan is Azrique's most trusted agent, a gloom whom she recruited while travelling in the City of a Thousand Mirrors shortly after she lost the Ebon Ring to the Baneliness. Malvan is devoted to her. His role here is to be her silent, watchful observer moving undetected among the tents and making sure her subordinates remain loyal.

Malvan is an assassin of living creatures, not of undead, who are immune to his sneak attack damage. Azrique employs him for his stealth, not his killing ability, though she plans to make good use of him as a killer when she has the ring back.

The War Chest

Buried safely beneath the rug-covered floor of Azrique's command tent is her war chest. This is an adamantine-bound coffer containing the funds she intends to spend on hiring mercenaries to do the jobs that the undead she controls cannot do. The undead mostly have no use for money but humanoids seem to love the stuff…

The chest contains a *bag of holding*, within which are 150,000 gold pieces in coin.

Talisman of Life Shielding

This shard of apparently featureless black rock hangs from a simple leather cord. When a living creature holds it for more than one round, purple runes briefly appear that announce it as a protective item. The *talisman* confers a continual minor protection from negative energy. The wearer gains resistance to negative energy 10 and a +4 resistance bonus to saves against energy-draining attacks, death effects and negative energy effects.

The talisman allows the wearer to function normally on a minor negative-aligned plane, as the resistance conferred is more than enough to absorb the damage inflicted.

Moderate Necromancy: CL 12th; Craft Wondrous Item, *death ward*; 20,000 gp, 1,600 xp.

Teeth of the Plague Ass

There are only a few of these nauseating items in circulation; would-be tyrants bid astronomical sums for them in secret interplanar auctions, ambitious necromancers send unwitting adventurers to fetch them back from forbidden tombs and wise counsellors seek out ways to destroy them safely lest their evil infect whole worlds.

Each one resembles a decayed molar that seems, based on a successful Knowledge (nature) check (DC 15), to have come from a mule or horse, with a ghastly smell of rot surrounding it. The *teeth* are said to have been pulled from the putrefying skull of the Plague Ass.

The story behind this creature is that an advanced civilisation of magicians, seeking to create a society free from the woes of disease, drew out all of the sicknesses that their people suffered or would *ever* suffer and transferred them to a single unfortunate ass, which was then exiled (in the manner of a scapegoat) to a distant plane, agonised with a thousand ailments from the common cold to leprosy and unable to die. So long as the Plague Ass held the diseases within it, the magicians' peoples would not suffer from any sickness.

As with most foolproof plans, it went disastrously wrong. Travellers walking the outer planes discovered the grey desert where the Plague Ass walked and recognised the massive power of pestilence that lay within its body. They pulled out the creature's teeth, realising that they could be used as weapons.

Powers: A single *tooth of the Plague Ass*, when crushed, infects the region with *pestilence* as per the epic spell. Every living thing in a 1,000-foot radius is instantly infected with slimy doom. Within 24 hours, everything in the area begins to show signs of rot and decay.

Each day that an infected creature fails a Fortitude save (DC 35), it is dealt 1d4 points of temporary Constitution damage. If the victim then fails a second save, one point of that damage is permanently drained. If the victim succeeds at the first save of the day on consecutive days, he recovers from the disease. This magical form of the disease is not contagious and does not spread beyond those initially infected. Fruits and vegetables infected with slimy doom are unfit for consumption, as are disease-ridden livestock.

Event: Parley with Azrique

This is a very open-ended encounter. There are enough undead here to turn a careless party into puree several times over, so unless the Player Characters have a quick escape route planned, combat is not the way through it.

In order to play Azrique fairly, the Games Master should bear in mind that she is lawful and is willing to make deals. Azrique has something that the Player Characters need, namely information about the Ebon Ring. They do not know it, but they have something that *she* needs – the power to destroy her errant daughter. The undead are much more at risk from the living, especially do-gooder clerics and paladins, than they are from each other. If she had a few willing good-aligned agents on her side, Azrique would not need an army of this size to do the job.

First Impressions: Azrique's initial reaction to the Player Characters is to test them. She gazes into her mirror, combing out her grey hair, then turns to them and asks, 'Am I not beautiful still?' If they attempt to flatter her or feign politeness, she snorts contemptuously and calls them idiots. If they honestly tell her 'No, you aren't,' she laughs and agrees.

Complications: The presence of any members of Hygrave's Huntsmen causes awkwardness. Unless the Huntsman is well disguised, Azrique orders Malvan to kill him, while leaving the rest of the party alone. She explains that he and some of his friends tried to destroy her, so she is acting in pre-emptive self-defence. She has no interest in dealing with the likes of him.

Idle Chat: If the Player Characters ask Azrique about any of the topics below, she provides the given information.

- **The Ebon Ring of the Carnifex:** *'It was created by the most terrible undead ever to have arisen. He was the stillborn child of a goddess. It was not meant to be a weapon, though he used it as one. Its power is to shape and condense negative energy. He who holds the Ebon Ring can make the darkness dance to his tune.'*

- **The Baneliness: '***She is an insane child. She had potential once – ah! so much potential! – but she trod the dark road far too soon. Now, she is consumed by wild power. Her destruction will be a mercy.'*

- **The Destruction of Arkossa: '***I would not be surprised if the Baneliness purposefully struck at that world to spite me. She knew I was raising troops there. I expect she thought to destroy me along with that benighted plane. Yes, I slaughtered humans in order to use their bodies for my own purposes. What of it? My pestilences took the weak and the old, while the strong survived. Had they not all perished, they would have been a stronger people because of me.'*

- **Bodiless Ao: '***Beware. I am not at liberty to say more. The demilich is not what he appears to be, nor is his little pet.'*

Making a Deal: However the conversation goes, Azrique proposes a deal:

'As you can tell, I am not the one to blame for this chaos among the planes. That wretched traitor who stole my ring has only proved her own inability to control it. It is she, not I, who devastated the world of Arkossa. She is the menace, she and her horde of howling anarchs.

'I have a proposal to make to you. I know where the Baneliness has made her lair. I shall open a gate *to that place. I shall tell you where to find her, and where her phylactery is hidden, so that you may destroy her. All this I shall do on one condition. You must swear to seek out the Ebon Ring of the Carnifex and return it to me.*

'This is not greed. This is sanity. Only I can control its power. It was wrought by one of the mightiest of all undead, so do not think for a moment that a mortal could wield it. It is called Ebon for a reason: the darkness of the Negative Plane coils within it in an endless loop. Your bones would be drier than mine if you touched it. I, though, can use it to undo the damage that has been done. I can calm the raging planes, control the negative energies left in the wake of the destroyed worlds… all this I will do.

'You will wonder why I ask you to do this, when I have an army assembled already. I believe you already know the answer. You are well qualified to destroy her. Your gods grant you powers that I cannot emulate. You have allies who would fear me and flee me. Fight fire with fire? Nay, I believe water is better suited to the task, think you not so?

'When the Ring is mine again and the planes are stable once more, I shall make a treaty with you. You shall be left in peace, you and your kin. Nay, more: the armies of the Bower of Blight shall defend you. You need not fear the dark, when the dark itself stands with you. Should you crave financial reward, I can provide it. My war chests contain over one hundred thousand gold sovereigns, a sum that I am sure will appeal to you. I had planned to use it to hire human mercenaries, but a handful of true heroes can achieve more in an hour than a thousand walking dogs can do in a month.

'What say you, heroes?'

Azrique is willing to allow the Player Characters some time to discuss the matter. They can return and speak to her after as much as 24 hours if they wish; she will inform the Bonewardens that they are not to be touched.

If the Player Characters accept the task, Azrique insists that they swear a solemn oath to find and return the Ebon Ring, as she specified. She then opens the *gate* to the Crumbling Marches and provides the Player Characters with a briefing (see below).

The Additional Traveller: There is no way that Azrique will let the Player Characters go off on a mission for her without her faithful servant following close behind. When the Player Characters are not present, she prepares Malvan with *superior invisibility*. When they pass through the *gate* to the Crumbling Marches, she holds it open long enough for Malvan to slip through unseen. The Player Characters may notice this. A Sense Motive check (DC 40) detects that the *gate* was left open for slightly longer than was necessary.

Charge of the Wight Brigade: If Azrique receives word from Malvan that the Player Characters have succeeded or that they have failed, she sends her forces into the Crumbling Marches to conquer them. Azrique is ready to move whenever needed. If she feels that an attack is what the Player Characters need to distract the Baneliness, then she provides that, too. The Games Master should use the attack by Azrique's army whenever it is dramatically appropriate.

The Huntsmen: If the Player Characters make a deal with Azrique and Hygrave's Huntsmen find out, the Huntsmen are dismayed. If one of their number has been killed, they become furious. As far as they are concerned, the Player Characters become *personae non grata*. Azrique is a piece of murderous undead filth in their eyes. They do not break their oaths to protect the Assembly, as they are deeply lawful, but if the Philosophers ever declare the Player Characters expelled from the Assembly, the Huntsmen use all their powers to track them down and slay them.

Location: The Crumbling Marches

This entire plane is tinged by sepia. Viewing the landscape is like looking through an old window of dusty green glass. The ground looks like common earth but is strangely soft and powdery, crumbling like a moth-eaten cloak. You leave footprints in it, as if in snow, as you move. Here and there are craters in the ground without obvious cause. It looks as though parts of the plane have simply vanished.

Far in the distance is an oddly rectilinear mountain. Its edges seem to be made up of straight lines at different angles, as if it is not a mountain at all but an immense building.

Planar Conditions

The Crumbling Marches has the following traits:

- No daylight or night. The lighting is the same dull green glow from the sky, all the time.

- The plane is alterable morphic except to the wielder of the Ebon Ring, who may treat it as divinely morphic with himself as the deity, within certain limits. See the description of the Ebon Ring's powers on page 143. This detail is important, as there are features of the plane that will probably strike the players as evidence that it is more morphic than it seems, such as the conditions within the Fortress of Ten Thousand Steps.

If the Player Characters are *gated* here by Azrique, they find themselves at the periphery of an expanse of ground where an army of undead creatures has encamped. The mountain looks like a building because this is, of course, what it is; it is the Fortress of Ten Thousand Steps.

The army of undead is not at all like Azrique's. Instead of regimented order, it is a charnel house, with creatures fighting and devouring one another in the ranks. Ghouls chew on the femurs of struggling skeletons, ghasts smash the heads off zombies with clubs for target practice and wights snarl and circle one another while onlookers cheer and vampires in black armour pass by with expressions of disgust.

Information: The Players' Briefing

Depending on who briefs them, either Azrique Malfaisance or Duke Hessamon can give the Player Characters the following instructions. Alternatively, they can learn this information through their own Divination magic.

'The Baneliness spends most of her time in the very heart of the Fortress of Ten Thousand Steps. There are three ways in that we know of.

'Firstly, there is the Maw, which opens at the top of the Fortress, drops right down through the centre like a throat and leads to her private chambers. It is unlikely that you will be able to get in that way, though. There are metal doors, fanged like a wolf, set all the way down the Throat, that slam shut when creatures draw close.

'The second way in is just as hard. There are about a hundred doorways on the outside of the mountain, set beside open-sided platforms connected by narrow steps. Anything larger than an ogre is going to have trouble negotiating those, unless it can fly. These doors open onto a rat-run of internal tunnels, narrow like the steps. Her whole strategy is to keep the access-ways tight and easy to defend, so that an army cannot storm the place.

'What you have to do is to work through the Fortress as if you were working up through the ranks. Everything is connected. It has to be, for the place to work at all. Using those tunnels, make your way to the nearest guardroom, then from there to one of the inner gateways, from there to the private stairs and from there to the vampires' quarters. That's where the Baneliness' military commanders are. From that point, you should be able to work your way inwards.

'The third way in is to use the drains, if you can find an entrance. All sorts of sludge gets washed down there, thanks to her necromantic research. Expect the drains to be barred and populated. We are not sure by what.'

The following information can only be given out by one of the two undead:

Duke Hessamon: '*This map will show you the quickest route to the vampires' quarters.'* He gives the Player Characters a map in a scroll case. *'If I see you in there, I will pretend that I am trying to kill you, so make it look convincing or you will blow my cover completely.*

'By the way, there is another reason why the Baneliness keeps the tunnels narrow. She can reshape the Fortress with the power of her will. If she finds out you are in there, she can pinch off both ends of a tunnel and seal you in. My advice is never to rest in small rooms.'

Azrique Malfaisance: '*The creature keeps her phylactery in a doll. It is a sentimental, ridiculous practice. However else she may have changed, I am certain she has not outgrown this.'*

Non-Player Character Group: The Army of the Baneliness

The army is mostly made up of ghouls, with some zombies and skeletons to act as cannon fodder. An incorporeal force of shadows under the command of Lord Skraith acts as the reconnaissance and espionage unit. Ten shadows from this unit constantly patrol the limits of the camp, surveying the grounds in a wide sweep.

The Baneliness has entrusted her army to two factions, one made up of nightwalkers and the other of vampires. Of these, the nightwalkers are dominant over the rabble, ruling the lower ranks like independent warlords, while the vampires remain in the Fortress and pass orders down to the nightwalkers.

There are twenty nightwalkers in total. Each one considers part of the field to be his 'territory'. The disorder of the

camp means that there are no stationary sentries keeping watch. Even if the Player Characters are detected by the flying patrol of shadows, it takes around eight rounds for a nearby nightwalker to react and reach them.

The nightwalkers are of unusually vast size:

Advanced Nightwalker: CR 24; Gargantuan undead (extraplanar); HD 35d12+30; hp 257; Init +6; Spd 40 ft, fly 20 ft. (poor); AC 34, touch 8, flat-footed 32; Base Atk +17; Grp +47; Atk +31 melee (3d6+18, slam); Full Atk +31 melee (3d6+18, 2 slams); Space/Reach 20 ft./15 ft.; SA crush item, desecrating aura, evil gaze, spell-like abilities, summon undead; SQ aversion to daylight, damage reduction 15/silver and magic, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, spell resistance 35, telepathy 100 ft., undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +17, Ref +13, Will +28; Str 46, Dex 14, Con —, Int 20, Wis 20, Cha 21.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +43, Diplomacy +20, Hide +28, Knowledge (arcana) +29, Listen +41, Move Silently +40, Search +43, Sense Motive +43, Spellcraft +45, Spot +43, Survival +5 (+7 following tracks); Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Epic Fortitude, Epic Toughness, Epic Will, Great Fortitude, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*unholy blight*).

Note: When hiding in a dark area, a nightwalker gains a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks.

Crush Item (Su): A nightwalker can destroy any weapon or item of Large size or smaller (even magic ones, but not artefacts) by picking it up and crushing it between its hands. The nightwalker must make a successful disarm attempt to grab an item held by an opponent. The item is entitled to a Fortitude save (DC 45) to resist destruction. The save DC is Strength-based.

Evil Gaze (Su): A creature within 30 feet of the nightwalker who meets the nightwalker's gaze must succeed on a Will save (DC 32) or be paralysed with fear for 1d8 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by the same nightwalker's gaze for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *contagion* (DC 19), *deeper darkness*, *detect magic*, *greater dispel magic*, *haste*, *see invisibility*, *unholy blight* (DC 19); 3/day – *confusion* (DC 19), *hold monster* (DC 20), *invisibility;* 1/day – *cone of cold* (DC 20), *finger of death* (DC 22), *plane shift* (DC 22). Caster level is 21st and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Undead (Su): A nightwalker can summon undead creatures once per 24-hour period: 7–12 shadows, 2–5 greater shadows or 1–2 dread wraiths. The undead arrive in 1d10 rounds and serve for one hour or until released.

Event: Capture

In the event that one or more of the Player Characters is overpowered while outside the castle, the nightwalkers keep them prisoner (binding them with manacles) while one of the vampires is sent for. Within five minutes, two elect vampires per captured Player Character arrive; the Baneliness is *scrying* on these elect vampires, so she gets a good look at the Player Characters unless they have countermeasures running. These then grapple the Player Characters with their long clawed hands and fly with them to the Maw atop the Fortress, where they hurl them down.

As the Player Characters hurtle toward the closed Maw, it opens to receive them. The other doors of the Maw open sequentially as they fall, allowing them to drop all the way into the plunge pool in the Room of Twisted Rhymes (see page 128). If they break their fall by any means, such as *feather fall* or *flying*, the subsequent doors fail to open.

Non-Player Character Group: The Fortress Guards

The Baneliness uses vampires as her guards. They are intelligent, versatile and loyal enough for the job. The majority are fighters. Areas of minor importance, such as lesser guard stations, have retinues of 2–5 vampire sentries present. Major areas have 1–4 vampire sentries and one elect vampire to lead them. Zones that are not often passed through (such as drains) have banewracks, the mutated products of failed elect vampire transformations, sent to guard them.

Vampire Sentry, Human Ftr20: CR 22; Medium undead (augmented humanoid); HD 20d12; hp 130; Init +8; Spd 20 ft.; AC 34, touch 13, flat-footed 31; Base Atk +20; Grp +28; Atk +37 melee (1d10+22/19–20, *+8 heavy flail*) or +24 melee (1d6+8 plus energy drain, slam) or +28 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+3 composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus)); Full Atk +37/+32/+27/+22 melee (1d10+22/19–20, *+8 heavy flail*) or +24 melee (1d6+8 plus energy drain, 2 slams) or +28/+23/+18/+13 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+3 composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus)) or +26/+26/+21/+16/+11 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+3 composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus)); SA blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dominate, energy drain; SQ alternate form, damage reduction 10/silver and magic, fast healing 5, gaseous form, resistance to cold 10, resistance to electrical 10, spider climb, turn resistance +4; AL CE; SV Fort +14, Ref +12, Will +9; Str 26, Dex 18, Con —, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +10, Climb +21, Craft (alchemy) +12, Handle Animal +11, Hide +9, Intimidate +24, Listen +11, Jump +19, Move Silently +9, Ride +17, Search +10, Sense Motive +9, Spot +11, Swim +18; Alertness[B], Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes[B], Dodge, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative[B], Improved Trip, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes[B], Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (heavy flail), Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Specialisation (heavy flail), Weapon Specialisation (longbow), Whirlwind Attack.

Alternate Form (Su): The vampire can assume the shape of a dire wolf as a standard action. This ability is similar to a *polymorph* spell cast by a 12th level character, except that the vampire does not regain hit points for changing form. It must remain in this form for 12 hours.

Blood Drain (Ex): A vampire can suck blood from a living victim with its fangs by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On each such successful attack, the vampire gains five temporary hit points.

Children of the Night (Su): Once per day, the vampire can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms or a pack of 3d6 wolves as a standard action. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve the vampire for up to one hour.

Create Spawn (Su): A humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain by a vampire's energy drain rises as a vampire spawn 1d4 days after burial. If the vampire instead drains the victim's Constitution to zero or lower, the victim returns as a spawn if it had four or fewer Hit Dice and as a vampire if it had five or more Hit Dice.

Dominate (Su): Anyone the vampire targets (a standard action) must succeed on a Will save (DC 21) or instantly fall under the vampire's influence as though affected by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Energy Drain (Su): Living creatures hit by a vampire's slam attack gain two negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, the vampire gains five temporary hit points. A vampire can use its energy drain ability once per round.

Fast Healing (Ex): A vampire heals five points of damage each round so long as it has at least one hit point. If reduced to zero hit points in combat, it automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. It must reach its sarcophagus within two hours or be utterly destroyed; it can travel up to nine miles in two hours. Any additional damage dealt to a vampire forced into gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest in its coffin, a vampire is helpless. It regains one hit point after one hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of five hit points per round.

Gaseous Form (Su): As a standard action, a vampire can assume gaseous form at will as per the *gaseous form* spell (caster level 5th), but it can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect manoeuvrability.

Spider Climb (Ex): A vampire can climb sheer surfaces as though with a *spider climb* spell.

Equipment & Treasure: +10 spiked breastplate of the lichqueen, +8 heavy flail, +3 mighty composite longbow, augmented acid flask (2), augmented alchemist's fire bottle (2), augmented tanglefoot bag, arrows (20), key to all outer locations..

Note on the +10 Spiked Breastplate of the Lichqueen: The spikes of the breastplate are magic weapons in their own right, dealing 1d4+10 points of damage when grappling or used as an offhand weapon. The sentry vampires like to impale their victims on the spikes while draining their blood, as the added pain and terror flavours the blood with adrenalin. When worn by a non-undead, this functions as a *+5 spiked breastplate*.

Non-Player Character Group: The Elect Vampires

The Baneliness' most favoured vampires are brought to a private chamber within the Fortress of Ten Thousand Steps, there to undergo a shocking transformation. By the power of the Ebon Ring and the Baneliness' sarcophagus of transmutations (see below), she alters them so that they become barely recognisable monsters. Their bones stretch, the flesh shrinks around them, their fangs elongate until they resemble those of a sabre-tooth tiger, membranous wings erupt from their backs and their skin becomes transparent as glass.

Not all vampires survive the process, and a thin red dust is often all that remains. The minds of most who do are destroyed, so that they become mere fighting machines in the service of their mistress. A few rare specimens such as Lord Skraith are strong-willed enough to keep both body and mind intact. These acquire the power to shift from their larger, winged form into their original form and back. See the Elect Vampire template in Appendix 3: New Monsters for details.

Elect Vampire, (Human Form), Human Ftr20: CR 23; Medium undead (augmented humanoid); HD 20d12; hp 130; Init +8; Spd 20 ft.; AC 41, touch 13, flat-footed 38;

Base Atk +20; Grp +28; Atk +35 melee (1d8+16/x3, *+6 dire flail of anarchic power*) or +28 melee (1d6+8 plus energy drain, slam) or +28 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+3 composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus)) or manyshot (see below); Full Atk +35/+30/+25/+20 melee (1d8+16/x3, *+6 dire flail of anarchic power*) or +33/+28/+23/+18 melee and +33/+28 melee (1d8+16/x3 and 1d8+12/x3, *+6 dire flail of anarchic power*) or +28 melee (1d6+8 plus energy drain, 2 slams) or +28/+/23/+18/+13 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+3 composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus)) or +26/+26/+21/+16/+11 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+3 composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus)); SA blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dominate, energy drain; SQ +4 turn resistance, alternate form, damage reduction 10/silver and magic, fast healing 5, gaseous form, ghastly form, resistance to cold 10 and electrical damage 10, spider climb; AL CE; SV Fort +12, Ref +12, Will +9; Str 26, Dex 18, Con —, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +10, Climb +21, Craft (alchemy) +12, Handle Animal +11, Hide +12, Intimidate +24, Listen +11, Jump +19, Move Silently +12, Ride +17, Search +10, Sense Motive +9, Spot +11, Swim +18; Alertness[B], Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes[B], Dodge[B], Great Cleave, Improved Initiative[B], Improved Trip, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes[B], Manyshot, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Spring Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (dire flail), Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Specialisation (dire flail), Weapon Specialisation (longbow), Whirlwind Attack.

Manyshot: As a standard action, the elect vampire may fire multiple arrows simultaneously at a single opponent within 30 feet. He may fire up to four arrows with the attack roll modified to +23 for two arrows, +21 for three arrows or +19 for four arrows. Damage reduction and other resistances apply separately against each arrow fired.

Special Abilities: See vampire sentry above.

Equipment & Treasure: See elect vampire (ghastly form) below.

Elect Vampire (Ghastly Form), Human Ftr20; CR 23; Large undead (augmented humanoid); HD 20d12; hp 130; Init +7; Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (average); AC 41, touch 13, flat-footed 38; Base Atk +20; Grp +38; Atk +33 melee (1d8+14 plus energy drain, slam) or +33 melee (1d8+14, bite); Full Atk +33 melee (1d8+14 plus energy drain, 2 slams) and +31 melee (1d8+7, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, energy drain; SQ +4 turn resistance, alternate form, damage reduction 10/silver, bludgeoning and magic, fast healing 10, gaseous form, ghastly form, improved grab, resistance to cold 10 and electrical damage 10, spider climb; AL CE; SV Fort +12, Ref +11, Will +9; Str 38, Dex 16, Con —, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +10, Climb +27, Craft (alchemy) +12, Handle Animal +11, Hide +7, Intimidate +24, Listen +11, Jump +25, Move Silently +11, Ride +16, Search +10, Sense Motive +9, Spot +11, Swim +24; Alertness[B], Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes[B], Dodge[B], Flyby Attack[B], Great Cleave, Improved Initiative[B], Improved Trip, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes[B], Manyshot, Mobility, Multiattack[B], Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Spring Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (dire flail), Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Specialisation (dire flail), Weapon Specialisation (longbow), Whirlwind Attack.

Blood Drain (Ex): The elect vampire's blood drain attack deals 2d4 points of Constitution drain when in ghastly form.

Equipment & Treasure: +10 spiked breastplate of the lichqueen (see Sentry Vampire), *+6 dire flail of anarchic power*, *+3 mighty composite longbow*, arrows (20), augmented acid flask (2), augmented alchemist's fire bottle (2), augmented tanglefoot bag, key to all middle locations, *ring of protection +5*.

Note on the +6 dire flail of anarchic power: When the *+6 dire flail of anarchic power* strikes a lawful target, it deals +3d6 points of bonus chaotic damage to the target and the target gains one negative level; this negative level may be removed 24 hours later on a successful Fortitude save (DC 23). However, on a successful critical hit, the *dire flail* instead deals +9d6 points of chaotic damage and causes the target to gain *three* negative levels.

Non-Player Character Group: The Golems

The fortress' housekeeper and nurse to the Baneliness, Mrs. Persimmon, maintains a staff of larger than average flesh golems who do all of the menial work. This mostly involves clearing up trash, hauling siege engines from one place to another, keeping the corridors clean and performing similar dull tasks. The golems have standing orders to report back to the Halls of Maintenance (see page 124) if they hear the Summoning Bell. If the golems encounter intruders, they roar and attack them, trying to smash them and clear them away as if they were debris blocking the tunnels.

Superior Flesh Golem: CR 12; Huge Construct; HD 27d10+40; hp 188; Init -1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20, touch 7, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +20; Grp +39; Atk +29 melee (3d8+11, slam); Full Atk +29 melee (3d8+11, 2 slams);

Space/Reach 15 ft./15 ft.; SA berserk; SQ construct traits, damage reduction 5/adamantine, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to magic, low-light vision; AL N; SV Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +9; Str 32, Dex 8, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1.

Berserk (Ex): When a flesh golem enters combat, there is a cumulative 1% chance each round that its elemental spirit breaks free and the golem goes berserk. The uncontrolled golem goes on a rampage, attacking the nearest living creature or smashing some object smaller than itself if no creature is within reach, then moving on to spread more destruction. The golem's creator, if within 60 feet, can try to regain control by speaking firmly and persuasively to the golem, which requires a Charisma check (DC 19). It takes one minute of inactivity by the golem to reset the golem's berserk chance to 0%.

Immunity to Magic (Ex): A flesh golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below:

- A magical attack that deals cold or fire damage slows a flesh golem (as the *slow* spell) for 2d6 rounds with no save.

- A magical attack that deals electrical damage breaks any *slow* effect on the golem and heals one point of damage for every three points of damage the attack would otherwise deal. If the amount of healing causes the golem to exceed its full normal hit points, it gains any excess as temporary hit points. For example, a flesh golem hit by a *lightning bolt* heals three points of damage if the attack would have dealt 11 points of damage. A flesh golem gets no save against attacks that deal electrical damage.

The Fortress of Ten Thousand Steps

The mountain before you is not a mountain but a fortress. Wall upon wall, tower upon tower, plateau upon plateau, it rises to impossible heights. The detail is incredible and seems somehow unreal: it is as though some expert toymaker had taken a block of onyx and spent his life carving it into a model *of a fortress, every tiny window and flight of steps perfect and in place.*

The Baneliness has used the Ebon Ring to reshape reality within the Crumbling Marches. Over the years, she has transformed a mountain into a fortress simply through the power of visualisation and the matter-altering abilities of the Ebon Ring. This construction has had a price, however; the energy to reshape the mountain has been leeched from the surrounding lands. This is why they are now crumbling away into unreality.

This reworking of the real means that planar conditions within the Fortress (defined as any point within 30 feet of the Fortress's physical limits, including underground rooms) are treated as those of a different plane. The conditions are:

- **Special Morphic:** The wielder of the Ebon Ring may rearrange reality as she chooses, within certain limits. She may move any part of the Fortress that is normally capable of easy motion at will. Thus she may open or close doors, raise or lower portcullises and so on as a free action. She may reconfigure the Fortress at will, opening new rooms and closing old ones. She may not, however, move the edges of the rooms at more than ten feet per hour, nor may she focus on more than one 1,000-foot-cubed section of the Fortress at a time.

Fortress Doors and Walls

The Baneliness has infused the Fortress with magical power to fortify it against attack. The walls are made of magically treated unworked stone; although the stone has been shaped, it has not been worked with tools and is therefore stronger.

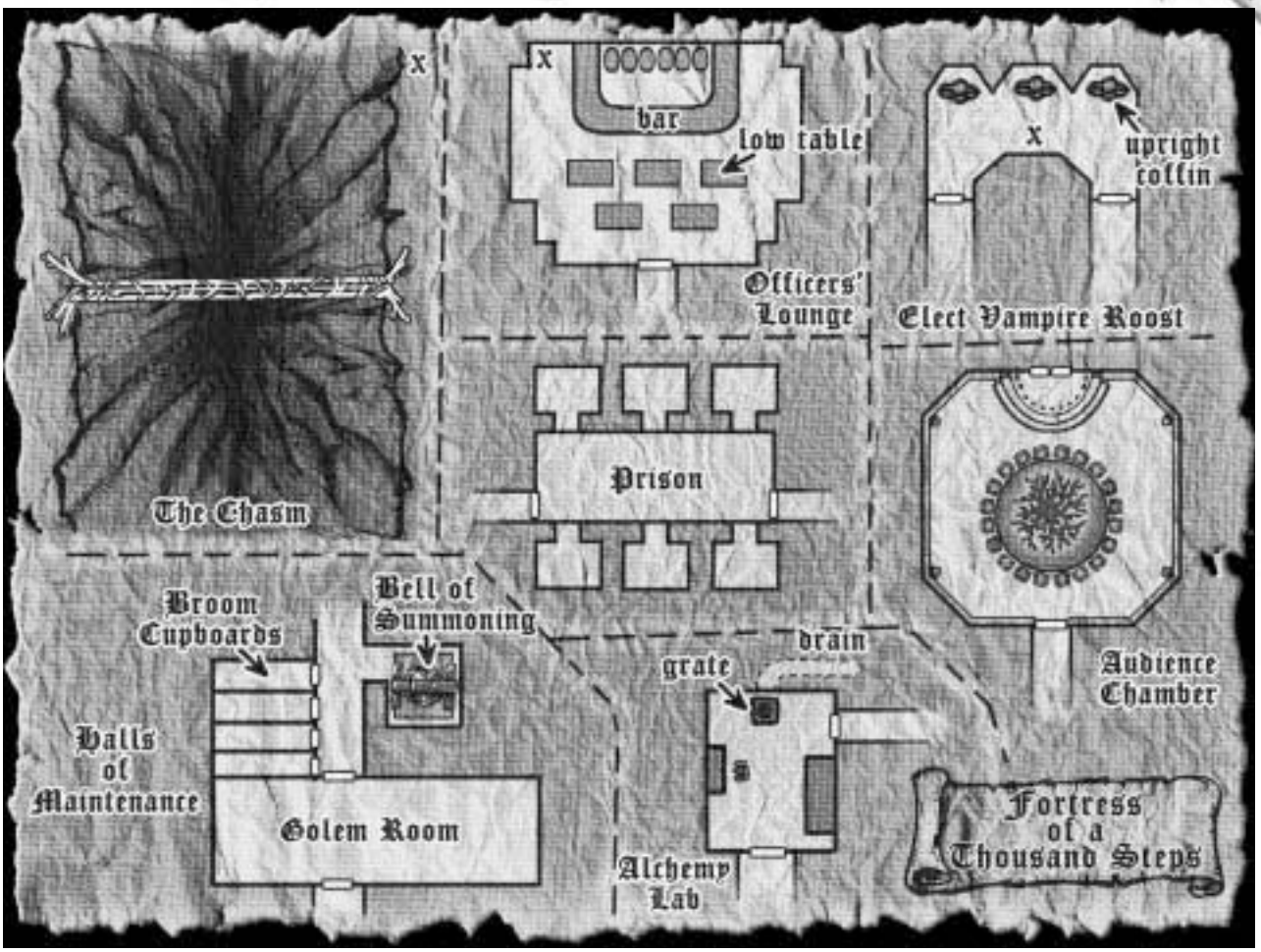
Magically Treated Stone Wall: Typical thickness 5 ft; Break DC 85; hardness 16; 1,800 hp.

The doors are bizarre. They are made from stone that looks like wood and metal from a distance, complete with what appear to be shaped stone doorknobs and (usually non-functional) keyholes. Each door is locked by a sliding stone pinion on the inside of the door, and moves on a single pivot.

Any key-locked door may be opened with an Open Lock check (DC 50). Some lockable doors do not have keyholes at all, as the Baneliness usually opens and closes the locks through the powers of her mind and the Ebon Ring. There is no way to open these lock by manual manipulation; they must be broken, or magic must be used.

Magically Treated Stone Door: Hardness 16; Thickness 4 in.; Stuck break DC 48; Locked Break DC 48; 120 hp.

Spell Resistance: All doors and walls within the Fortress have spell resistance 35.



- Space within the Fortress is strongly chaos-aligned and evil-aligned.

- **Limited Magic:** No form of extradimensional travel is possible to or from the Fortress. The area is treated as if under the effects of a *dimensional lock* with a caster level of 30th.

The Outside of the Fortress

The main entrance into the Fortress for flying creatures is the Maw at the top (see below). For ground-bound creatures there is a dizzying climb up the side of the mountain, following zigzag stairs that are between three and five feet across, to the guard platforms. These platforms are fifteen feet square and are typically occupied by 1–3 vampire sentries. The Baneliness' idea of defence is to have the whole exterior of her Fortress swarming with loyal undead with ranged attacks so they can rain missiles upon ground-based invaders and flying creatures with equal ease.

There are no safety rails on either the stairs or the platforms, so it is very easy to be knocked off by a bull rush attack. The drop from a stair to the next solid surface is between 10 and 100 feet, depending on the point from which one falls. The drop from a platform is 100 + (1d4x10) feet. See the Typical Platform Array map for the layout of each section.

Many of the platforms are simply guard posts where vampire sentinels stand on duty, ready to bring flying foes down with arrows. A rare few of the platforms include doorways into the Fortress.

The Doorways

The entrances to the Fortress are small unremarkable openings that look as though they are made of dark ironbound wood. From closer (40 feet or less) it becomes clear that they are actually made from stone shaped to look like wood.

Closer examination of these doors with a Search check (DC 40) or Spot check (DC 40) reveals that they are all identical – not just of similar manufacture, but *identical* down to the knots and grains in the 'wood'. This is because the Baneliness used one door as the mental template for the rest.

Sentry Forms

The sentry forms are the Baneliness' watchful eyes. They are set in such a way that no creature in the Fortress is ever more than forty feet away from one, and are present at all junctions of passageways, all guard rooms and all external platforms (see X on the various maps).

A revolting sight greets you. A partly decomposed human body has been mounted on a wooden frame, its arms and legs lashed to the beams. These beams are in turn fixed securely to the stone below. The body has been gutted. Two long ropes of viscera trail from its open stomach cavity and disappear into the stone. Abruptly the corpse moves, *jerking its head.*

A closer look at this horror reveals that its innards have fused with the stone. The body's head jerks from left to right as if watching a game of tennis.

The Baneliness can *scry* on any one sentry form as if on a familiar and can transfer her attention between them as a free action, though she cannot switch between more than two sentries in a round. She is not capable of seeing through all the sentries' eyes at once. If the Baneliness loses sight of a target or wishes to search the Fortress for something she believes is there, she may make a special Search check to locate the target, providing it is actually within scrying range of a sentry. This represents the Baneliness mentally browsing through her 'security cameras' until she finds one that shows her what she is looking for. Each minute of searching allows her one Search check (DC 20) to find the target. If her target actively tries to hide, her Spot check is opposed by the target's Hide check.

A sentry form is nothing but an ordinary zombie with privileges. It is easily destroyed. However, the Baneliness is immediately alerted to the death or change in status (such as by turning) of any of her sentries, and dispatches an elect vampire or three to five vampire sentries to investigate and report.

The Maw

The Maw is a sunken circular depression at the top of the Fortress, forty feet in diameter, surrounded by a wall twenty feet high. The well-like depression has a stone slab one foot thick closing it off, which on examination proves to be split by a jagged crack.

In an alcove in the wall is a sentry form, watching the slab for intruders.

The Baneliness can open this slab like a door. The sections slide apart, opening like a fanged mouth. The Maw can also close in an instant, slamming closed on any creature attempting to pass through it. The Baneliness makes this attack as though the Maw has been readied against the attempt to pass through (+15 melee, damage 6d6). A creature who is hit for damage is pinned (grapple bonus +20) until the Baneliness opens the door again or the creature frees itself. A creature caught and pinned by the slab has a flat 50% chance to be on the far side of the slab, and thus inside the Throat (see below), when it is pinned.

The Throat

Directly beneath the Maw is the Throat, a stone chute that leads down through the Fortress and into the Room of Twisted Rhymes. There are further jaw-like doors set at 1,000-foot intervals down the length of the Throat, five in total, each one with a sentry form dangling from the wall close by.

Into the Fortress

The Fortress is much too large to map as a whole. Instead this book provides descriptions and maps of the various important locations within the Fortress. The Games Master should use narrative, rather than mapped movement, to run the Player Characters' movement from area to area. If the Player Characters have Duke Hessamon's map they can follow the highlighted route and encounter the rooms in sequence (in the order they are presented below). If they explore on their own initiative or become lost, the Games Master should choose rooms for them to encounter at random or according to what is appropriate for the outer, middle or inner portions of the Fortress. Sentry vampires carry keys to the locked rooms in all outer areas, while elect vampires carry keys that open all doors in the outer and middle areas.

Rare Rooms: Some rooms are more commonly encountered than others. If the Player Characters explore at random, the Games Master can use a rare room as a change from the monotony of endless guardrooms and barracks.

Outer Locations

The outer regions of the Fortress are where the lower ranks of sentry vampires live. Their lives consist of plodding, aimless routine. They have nothing to aspire to but the possibilities of becoming elect or achieving oblivion in battle when Azrique's forces finally arrive. The highlight of a sentry vampire's day is the delivery of goblets of fresh blood from the Cattleyards (see below).

Outer Guard Station

An outer guard station is a simple crossroads widened out into a 30-foot-by-30-foot room. One entrance leads to the exterior of the Fortress, while another leads further in

toward the vampires' quarters. The other two entrances lead to another outer location. The furniture is spartan, consisting of a wooden table and a few pewter goblets crusted with blood.

An outer guard station always contains from one to three sentry vampires, or one elect vampire plus one sentry.

Outer Vampire Barracks

Each of these gloomy rooms is sealed at either end by a locked stone door requiring an Open Lock check (DC 40) to open. Within are eight stone sarcophagi lined up in regimental order. Vampire sentries who are off duty slumber here. This is also where gaseous sentry vampires flee to regenerate. At any one time, three out of the eight sarcophagi have occupants.

Ballista Station

The corridor bulges out here, with a wide slit in the wall showing through to the sky outside. Mounted in the centre of the semicircular bulge is a ballista, its base fixed to a brass disc. The whole apparatus looks as if it can swivel easily. Beside the ballista is a barrel, with tarry material around the bung.

The ballista stations are used to bring down flying opponents if the Fortress comes under attack. Unless an attack is underway, they are not usually manned. The barrel is filled with an especially sticky blend of alchemist's fire which, when applied to ballista bolts, causes them to burst into flame. This allows them to deal an additional 2d6 points of fire damage to their targets.

Arsenal (Rare Location)

The doors to each of these rooms are kept locked, though they may be opened with an Open Lock check (DC 40).

This room is clearly for weapons storage. Weapon racks stand against the walls, with dire flails and heavy flails gathering dust there. A bank of shelves on a third wall holds murky glass flasks, squashy leather-like bundles and ceramic bottles, each one marked with a label.

The labels identify the glass bottles as containing acid, the ceramic bottles as containing alchemist's fire and the bundles as tanglefoot bags. Each arsenal contains fifteen of each. These have been prepared using the Augmented Alchemy epic feat. The acid deals 2d6 points of acid damage, the alchemist's fire 2d6 points of fire damage and the tanglefoot bags last for 4d4 rounds.

The dire flails and heavy flails (1d4 of each) are masterwork weapons, not magic items.

The Cattleyards (Rare Location)

The stench in this room is familiar to you, though you associate it more with crowded cities than with the interior of a fortress of the undead. It is the smell of hundreds of human beings crammed into one small area; grimy flesh, unwashed hair and bodily waste.

You see them, naked and straggle-haired, penned up together in groups of ten to twenty, the men on one side of the chamber, the women on the other. Some of them are feeding, scooping handfuls of gruel up from troughs. Others stand around inertly, batting flies away from their bodies. Their expressions are vacant and horribly reminiscent of grazing cattle. They all wear strange brass collars from which protrude little toggles.

In the centre of the room are brass grates, presumably the way down into a drainage system.

A group of four vampire sentries watches over this region. If the Player Characters watch for a while undisturbed, they see the sentries take sly bites of the humans, who do not resist.

These unfortunates are members of the human herd who keep the vampires fed. The Baneliness brought a city's worth of captives here, intending to keep them and breed them like cows. When they became rebellious she concocted a mild poison that would keep them docile. The gruel is poisoned with a chemical that deals Intelligence damage over time, although it never reduces a creature's Intelligence score below two.

The collars have spigots attached to magical spikes in the humans' necks which allow their jugular veins to be tapped without killing them. Leaving a spigot open drains one point of Constitution per round.

The grates can be used to access the drainage system. They are two and a half feet across and fixed in place by bolts; to open them the Player Characters must force them (Break DC 25) or use magic.

Middle Locations

The middle section of the Fortress forms the strongest line of defence against invaders.

Guard Station

This type of room is designed to bottleneck invading enemies into one area so that they can be destroyed more easily. Two corridors lead into the room from separate parts of the outer section, penetrating some 30 feet in. Each of these entrances has an open iron grating for a roof, allowing the sentries in the guard station to pour flaming oil

or molten metal down on invaders. A winch by the doors on the opposite side allows the guards to drop portcullises at the points indicated, sealing off the 30-foot sections and leaving the trapped invaders with no escape.

One route leads out of the room: a stone door ten feet wide. This has a semicircular wall surrounding it, allowing archers to kneel behind the wall and use it for cover.

Cauldrons: There is a cauldron poised on chains above each 30-foot section of corridor, ready to overbalance and spill its contents onto those in the corridor below. The cauldrons currently contain oil. If the sentries are alerted to the approach of invaders, the oil is ignited. With enough warning of what they are to face, the sentries can fill the cauldrons with acid or hot coals instead.

Depending on the Fortress's state of alert, a guard station of this kind may either have two sentry vampires and one elect vampire on duty, or nine sentries and three elect.

Chasm

Many adversaries can fly, but not all. This area is intended to weed out those who cannot:

You have reached the brink of a sheer chasm plunging down into the darkness. This is no natural formation; it has been shaped. The edges are sheer and completely flat, which adds to the giddy horror of the drop. A strangely shaped bridge, a mere foot across at the top and widening towards the base, spans the chasm.

The chasm drops for three hundred feet before bottoming out in a pit of bones and trash.

The flat one-foot-wide top of the bridge is slick with an almost invisible lubricating agent, which makes the ledge practically impossible to walk on; a character may notice the lubricant with a successful Spot check (DC 40). Balance checks made when moving across it have +40 added to the DC. The sides are similarly slick.

Sentry vampires who need to pass through this area simply use *spider climb* to move down the sides and scuttle across the chasm on the three-foot-wide underside of the ledge, which is not lubricated.

Officers' Lounge (Rare Location)

These areas are where the elect vampires relax and feed, enjoying the privileges that their rank has bought them:

This room is much more luxurious than any you have encountered yet. The air in here has a sweet, herbal smell. The walls are hung with embroidered tapestries featuring abstract repetitive motifs, mostly skulls entwined with briars. Five low tables, each surrounded by plump cushions, are arrayed across the floor.

Against one wall is a horseshoe-shaped zinc bar, upon which stand bottles and bowls. Behind the bar-like area are six huge bell jars filled with a wine-like liquid. Floating in these are the bodies of naked women and men. They look neither dead nor alive but somehow inert.

The occupants of the bell jars are humans whose blood has been found to be especially delicious. They are now preserved here as a vintner might preserve wines of excellent vintage. On special occasions such as the creation of a new elect vampire, one of them is fished out and bled.

The bell jars confer *temporal stasis* on their occupants to prevent them from growing old. The wine-like liquid contains herbal agents that enhance the flavour of the blood even further and keep the jars' occupants drugged and docile. The other bottles and flasks contain conventional wines, liqueurs and mead plundered from less fortunate planes.

The Player Characters can easily rescue the hapless blood-providers. They recover from their drowsy, drugged states in 1d4+1 hours (or instantly, if *neutralise poison* or something similar is used). They were taken prisoner from various different planes and now desperately want to go home.

The Survivors: Two of the people stored in the jars, a woman called Bryxia and her daughter Vessi, are survivors from the world of Arkossa, taken five years ago before the plane was destroyed. Reuniting these two with Hygrave's Huntsmen earns the Player Characters the undying loyalty of that faction or undoes any damage done to their reputation if they have lost some standing by making a deal with Azrique. Although they know the possibility exists, the Huntsmen have been unaware of any survivors other than themselves.

Elect Vampire Roost

The doors to this chamber are kept locked, but may be opened with an Open Lock check (DC 40).

This stone chamber has been ornamented with images of skeletal winged fiends reaching across the archways to touch their hands together. Against the wall stand upright containers that remind you of the Iron Maidens so often found in torture chambers. Each is hinged and made of polished black material that you recognise as adamantine, with rivets and a tiny grating on the front.

These are reinforced coffins for the elect vampires. When injured and in gaseous form, a vampire enters through the inch-high grate at the front, and can then regenerate in comfort. For security, the coffins are lockable from the inside. It is impossible to pick the lock on a coffin from the outside, as it is not within reach.

The coffins are extremely hard to break into. They are made from three-inch-thick adamantine plates, giving them a break DC of 66, 120 hit points per inch and hardness 20. Any character attempting to bash his way into a coffin creates a clamour that brings from one to three elect vampires into the room within 2d6 rounds. It is not possible to attack a vampire through the grate with weapons, though ingenious Player Characters may think of ways to reach the vampire, such as by pouring liquid through the grate.

Alchemy Lab (Rare Location)

This small room reeks pungently of burning and unpleasant chemicals. From the workbench, you quickly assess that it is an alchemical laboratory. There is a drainage grate in the northern part of the floor, blackened and crusted from the substances that have been tipped down through it.

Alchemical products are moved to the arsenals when they are made, so few are stored here. A Search check (DC 15) finds 1d4 augmented acid flasks, 1d3 augmented flasks of alchemists' fire and 1d2 augmented tanglefoot bags.

The grate can be used to climb into or out of the drains, but at a mere foot in width it is a tight squeeze for Medium creatures. The grate is fixed in place by bolts (Break DC 25).

Prison (Rare Location)

This miserable dungeon appears to have seen little use. It is clean and the air smells fresh. Adamantine-panelled walls close off six cells; the sliding doors in front of these are open, though they are equipped with large, bulky locks.

The locks are designed not to open again once a door is slammed shut. An Open Lock check (DC 70) is needed to pick them. Otherwise only the Baneliness can open them, using her mind to do so. The cells are airtight to prevent vampire prisoners from turning gaseous and escaping. Unfortunately for living creatures, there is only four hours' worth of breathable air for one creature in each cell.

If the Player Characters are captured while inside the Fortress, they are stripped of their equipment and taken here. Lord Skraith arrives after 10+1d20 minutes to interrogate them. After this interrogation he reports back to the Baneliness, who demands that the characters be brought across Bridge (see page 126) and into her personal realm. There she interrogates them herself. If she learns that they are working with Azrique, she keeps one of the characters as a hostage and sends the others back to slay Azrique as recompense for breaking into her stronghold. If they are working with Duke Hessamon, she has him publicly dismembered and keeps the Player Characters as her personal pets.

Inner Locations

The inner section of the Fortress is used for one purpose only: interaction between the vampires and their crazed mistress. No vampire ever passes beyond the inner section more than once in his career and that one time is for his elevation to elect status. The only exceptions to this are the Baneliness' own close companions, Lord Skraith, Mortec Chau and Mrs. Persimmon.

Audience Chamber

The walls of this huge room are decorated brightly, even garishly, with stylised sunflowers and images of animals at play. It seems distasteful in this place of death.

In the room's centre is a round table made from polished soapstone. Growing from the centre of the table is a small tree of black minerals, in whose branches are tiny flickering blue candles. Inlaid into the table's top are motifs of clowns, dogs with ruff collars and happy children. Twenty chairs surround it.

The first time the Player Characters encounter one of these rooms, add the following:

In one of these is a heap of blackened remains that may once have been human.

At the far end of the room is a podium, with stairs leading up to it and opened double doors behind it. A brightly coloured ball comes bouncing down the stairs and there is a sound of shrill laughter, then the doors swing closed.

This is where the Baneliness addresses her officers. Lately she has taken to bizarre and extreme means of enforcing loyalty. When sat upon, the chairs snap manacles around the sitters' arms and legs. A character must make a successful Reflex save (DC 32) to escape before the manacles close or a successful Escape Artist check (DC 50) to wriggle free afterwards.

The blue lights in the tree can be commanded to unleash electrical discharges which deal 10d6 points of damage per round (caster level 23rd), with a Fortitude save (DC 32) allowed for half damage. It is the Baneliness' habit to torture anyone she even suspects of disloyalty by blasting

them with electricity while they writhe and scream. Some of her subjects confess to deeds they have not committed in the hope that the torture will stop. If the Player Characters are captured, the Baneliness brings them here for interrogation.

The remains in the chair are those of Count Morkos, a former elect vampire who was *not* part of the conspiracy against the Baneliness, but whom she suspected and fatally interrogated. Duke Hessamon had to watch the Count suffer the death he knew was meant for him. The remains have a mostly intact skull, so the Player Characters can use *speak with dead* to communicate with Morkos' corpse.

The Ball: The ball is just a rubber toy, blue with a pattern of gold stars.

The Doors: The double stone doors are the way through into the Baneliness' central sanctum and labyrinth. They are locked with an internal locking mechanism that is dependent on the Baneliness's mental control to open; the locks cannot be picked.

The Halls of Maintenance (Unique Location)

This series of rooms is the domain of Mrs. Persimmon, who keeps the Fortress neat and tidy. Her other duty is to see to the Baneliness's physical health, daubing her with embalming fluid and stitching up the splits in her skin with twine.

Golem Room: *This area looks like a grisly combination of a mortuary and a hospital. The walls on one side are overflowing with pots of unguent, spindles of twine and thread, little tubs of what looks like tar and jars of herbs. Those on the other are hung with frightening tools such as those one would use in an autopsy, or perhaps in a dentist's chair in Hell.*

A small pot-bellied creature with a jackal's head is dissecting a human corpse that seems to have very little flesh left to remove. Beside him a plump human woman in a starched white apron is reading from a book. A barrel behind the jackal-headed creature, smelling strongly of vinegar, is filled with bobbing pieces of sinew and skin.

The small creature is one of the Abn Sukta (see page 220); the human woman is Mrs. Persimmon, who was the Baneliness's nurse and now tends to her in undeath. The book from which she is reading is a *flesh golem manual*. The two are preparing to create a new flesh golem.

If there is any disturbance, Mrs. Persimmon heads to the Bell of Summoning (or dispatches the Abn Sukta to do it) and calls the golems. Within ten rounds, 20 flesh golems arrive intent on disposing of the Player Characters.

Mrs. Persimmon, Female Human Clr26: CR 26; Medium humanoid; HD 26d8; hp 117; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +18; Grp +17; Atk +27 melee (1d6+9, *+10 light adamantine mace*); Full Atk +27/+22/+17 melee (1d6+9, *+10 light adamantine mace*); SA rebuke undead, spells; SQ damage reduction 15/ adamantine; AL NE; SV Fort +15, Ref +10, Will +20; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 20, Cha 15.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +19, Craft (leatherworking) +15, Diplomacy +10, Heal +14, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (religion) +10, Knowledge (the planes) +9, Profession (housekeeper) +20, Spellcraft +10; Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Ring, Craft Rod, Craft Wondrous Item, Improved Spell Capacity (10th), Maximise Spell, Multispell, Quicken Spell, Spell Focus (Necromancy).

Spells prepared (6/7+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/4+1/4+1/4+1/4+1/1, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th *– guidance, inflict minor wounds, light, mending (2), resistance;* 1st *– bane, command (2), cure light wounds, divine favour, doom, shield of faith;* 2nd *– desecrate*, make whole, owl's wisdom, resist energy (2), spiritual weapon;* 3rd *– blindness/deafness, cure serious wounds, dispel magic, magic vestment, protection from energy, speak with dead;* 4th *– cure critical wounds* (2), *death ward*, discern lies, divine power, sending;* 5th *– flame strike, greater command, spell resistance, symbol of pain (2);* 6th *– animate objects, blade barrier, greater dispel magic, harm;* 7th *– destruction*, dispel magic* (quickened), *repulsion, symbol of stunning;* 8th *– cure critical wounds* (quickened), *flame strike* (maximised), *summon monster VIII, symbol of death;* 9th *– blade barrier* (maximised), *energy drain, etherealness, greater command* (quickened), *summon monster IX*;* 10th *– harm* (quickened).
*Domain spell.

Domains: Death (touched target dies if has less than 26d6 hit points), Evil (cast evil spells at +1 caster level).

Equipment & Treasure: +10 light adamantine mace (shaped like a slim black rod), *ring of ineffable evil, ring of ironskin* (DR 15/adamantine), ring with yellow jewel (one of the three keys to the Baneliness's doorway), *rod of absorption* (50 charges).

Mrs. Persimmon is a very odd person. She believes in the absolute dominance of evil and death, but she goes about enforcing this in the manner of a Victorian housekeeper rather than that of a fire-breathing overlord and is best played as a 'satanic nanny'. She believes that pain is good for one, that human beings are filled with disgusting lusts for which death is the only cure and that the Baneliness is a precious creature who must be protected at all costs. She has a peculiar hatred of halflings, whom she believes are 'squalid little creatures, breeding all over the place, worse than rabbits'. She is contemptuous of Lord Skraith but adores Mortec Chau, especially for the calm he brings to her charge.

Broom Cupboards: *These long rooms contain nothing but mops, brooms, buckets and three inert figures with their heads bowed.*

The three figures are damaged golems (with 86, 66 and 43 hit points) left here until they can be repaired. Mrs. Persimmon calls them for assistance if there is trouble in the Golem Room.

The Bell of Summoning: *A twisted bell rope leads up into the darkness. From above you can hear the steady creak and groan of a heavy object swinging back and forth.*

If the bell rope is pulled, a deafening peal resounds through the Fortress. All of the golems shuffle to the Golem Room to receive their instructions from Mrs. Persimmon. If they find intruders, they blindly attack them.

The Inner Lake (Unique Location)

This is the final boundary between the realm of the vampire sentries and the private realm of the Baneliness. The drains end in vertical circular grates just above the level of the water. The grates are, as usual, bolted in place (Break DC 26). They act as an overflow valve for the black lake.

You have reached the shores of an underground lake deep within the mountain fortress's heart. The ceiling is forty feet above you. Once more, this is no natural feature but a deliberately engineered chamber. It is more of a massive pool than a lake. It makes no sense for a huge body of water to be in this part of the mountain, but it seems the ordinary rules of geology have been left behind.

The water is as black as squid ink, giving no sign of what may lurk beneath. From what you can see from your vantage point, it seems that the lake is circular, surrounding a central core of rock like a wide moat. There is a ten-foot drop from the edge of the floor down to the water's surface. Gentle waves wash black water down two drain outlets.

Before you a stone jetty stretches out onto the water, coming to a sudden end after about one hundred feet. On the other side of the lake you can make out the dim shape of another similar jetty. There is a gap of about a hundred feet between the two walkways. The jetty does not seem to have collapsed, as the break is too clean. It seems to have been built this way on purpose.

The air here smells putrid, as if something is rotting beneath the water.

There is a metal plaque by the side of the jetty, which reads:

'Cross neither by the sky nor by the waters. There is but One Path to the Throne.
'Come before the Mistress barefoot and penitent, for She sees all.
'Name but thy need, and he shall come.'

On the other side of the plaque is a sentry form, innards trailing into the rock of the jetty.

'Bridge': Waiting below the water's surface, hunched over, is a flesh colossus. His role is to provide a bridge between the stone jetties when he is called upon to do so. A call of

'Bridge!' from either jetty compels him to stand to his full height:

Like a new island rising from the sea, a mass of putrid flesh slowly surfaces. It seems at first to be a pile of corpses melted into one by some awful process of decomposition, but as it continues to rise you see that it is merely the back of a colossal humanoid figure. The thing raises its head. Thick black ropes stitch its mouth into a clownish grin. The effect is horribly like looking at a rag doll made from dead flesh.

Bridge stands, water streaming off him, and stretches his arms out from one jetty to the other while bowing his head. This creates a sturdy (if somewhat squelchy) walkway between the jetties. The undead are immune to Bridge's odour, but the Player Characters may have more trouble…

Bridge is instructed to allow only barefoot creatures to walk upon him. Any creature stepping on Bridge with booted feet is attacked.

So long as those passing through this room remain *either* on the stone sections *or* barefoot on Bridge's body, he remains docile unless attacked. Once all creatures in the area seem to have crossed, he sinks back down. If a creature enters the water or the air (by flying or leaping), Bridge becomes enraged and tries to crush them. If creatures try to do this surreptitiously while Bridge is below the water, an *alarm* spell (see below) alerts him.

If Bridge attacks with creatures still on his body, these creatures may make a grab attempt as an attack of opportunity. If they miss or choose not to attempt the grab, they fall into the water. A creature who successfully grabs Bridge counts as grappling him. Bridge himself is not 'in a grapple' and may move freely, although he takes a -20 penalty to all grapple attempts against the grabbing creature, just as if he had designated a part of his body as the grappling part (see the Improved Grab section in the *MM*).

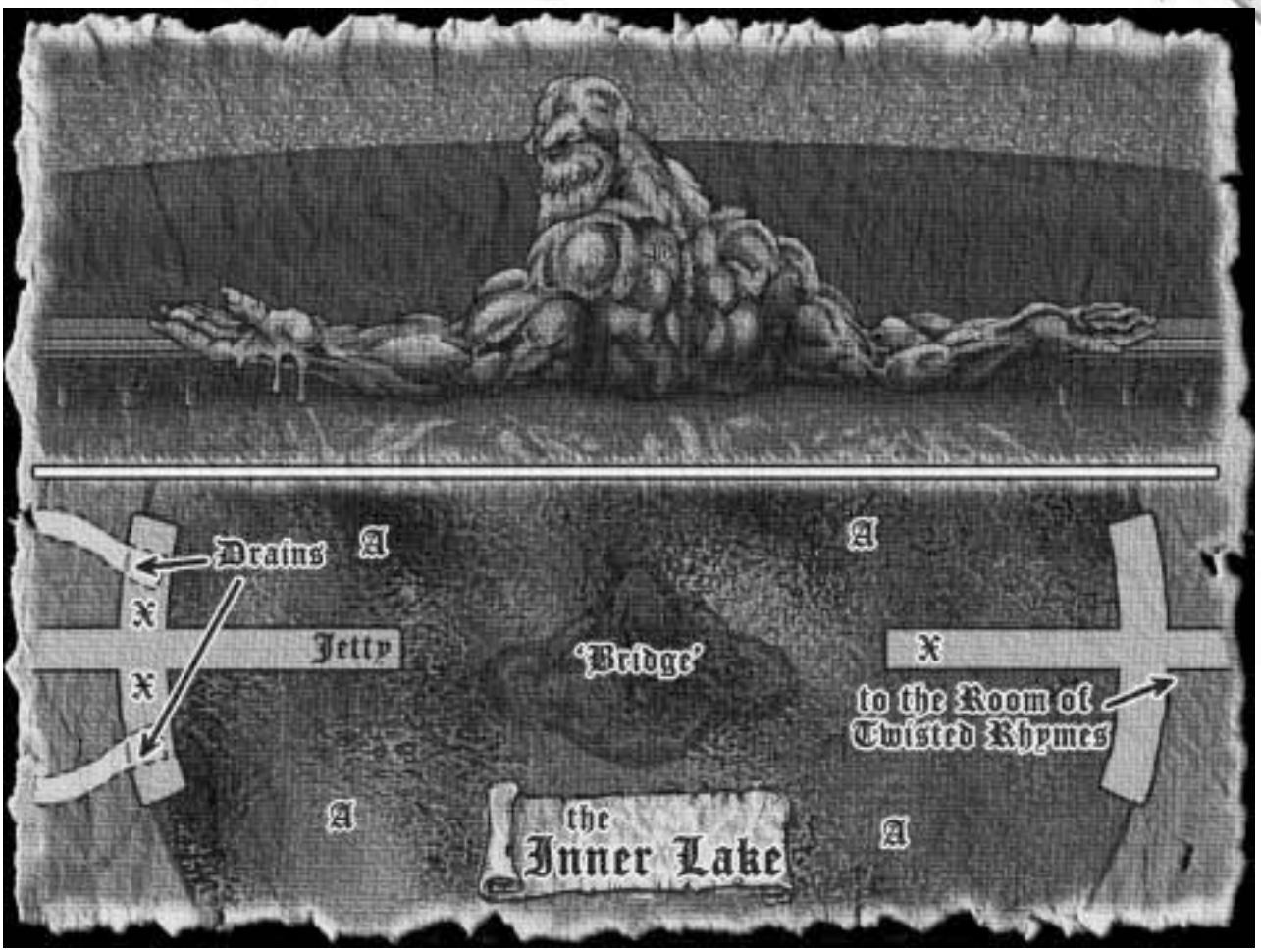
***Alarm* Spells:** Several permanent *alarm* spells (CL 23rd) have been placed at the locations marked 'A'. They alert Bridge if a creature enters the water or the air.

Bridge, Male Flesh Colossus: CR 27; Colossal construct; HD 100d10+80; hp 630; Init +2; Spd 40 ft. (cannot run); AC 45, touch 20, flat-footed 45; Base Atk +75; Grp +103; Atk +79 melee (6d6+18, club) or +79 melee (4d6+12, slam) or +65 ranged (4d6+12, thrown object weighing ten tons or less); Full Atk +79/+74/+69/+64 melee (6d6+18, club) or +79 melee (4d6+12, 2 slams) or +65 ranged (4d6+12, thrown object weighing ten tons or less); Space/Reach 30 ft./30 ft.; SA frightful presence, horrific appearance, stench, stomp; SQ construct traits, damage reduction 15/epic and adamantine, magic immunity, negative energy affinity; AL N; SV Fort +33, Ref +31, Will +33; Str 35, Dex 6, Con —, Int 1, Wis 11, Cha 1.

Skills & Feats: Jump +16; Improved Initiative.

Frightful Presence (Ex): All who come within a mile of Bridge and can see him must make a Will save (DC 55). Those who make their saves are shaken. Those who fail by 20 or fewer points are frightened. Those who fail by 21 to 40 points are panicked. Those who fail by 41 points or more cower. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Magic Immunity (Ex): Bridge is immune to all magical and supernatural effects except those that use negative energy (see below).



Negative Energy Affinity (Su): Any negative energy spell targeted at Bridge repairs damage at the rate of 1d10 hit points per level of the spell.

Stench (Ex): All creatures with a sense of smell who come within 300 feet of Bridge (when he is above the water) must make a Fortitude save (DC 60) or be nauseated and unable to attack, cast spells, concentrate on spells or do anything else requiring attention except for a single move or move-equivalent action per round. Those who succeed on their saves take a -4 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls, saves and skill checks for the next 2d6+4 minutes. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Stomp (Ex): As a full-round action, Bridge may stomp upon any adjacent foe (that is, any within the area he threatens). This special attack uses Bridge's Dexterity modifier instead of Strength and his attack roll modifier for this special attack is +65. If successful, the stomp deals double damage (8d6+24 points) and pins the victim until he chooses to release him.

Equipment & Treasure: Club.

The Drains

The drains can only be accessed from inside the Fortress, by opening the grates in the rooms with which they intersect, such as the alchemy lab and the Cattleyards. The Baneliness is not fool enough to place a possible entrance to her realm on the outer walls. The Player Characters can use the drains as bolt-holes, shortcuts or alternative routes past the central section of the Fortress.

The Flow: The drains tilt slightly downwards. The flow of waste constantly moves past, eventually feeding into a single massive cavern called the Mire of the Lost. The flow from this chamber is fed into another plane entirely, the Trashgardens of the Sklavadok, which are dealt with later in the next chapter.

The drainage pipes are ten-foot-wide cylinders with no walkways or other provisions for creatures needing to move around inside them.

The Banewracks: The reason why there are no rats or other vermin in the drains is the presence of the banewracks. When an attempted transformation into an elect vampire fails, the creatures who preside over the process simply

dump the deformed mutant down the drain, where it falls into the Mire of the Lost.

The banewracks continually fight amongst one another. Some seek refuge in the upper drains, where unfortunate Player Characters are likely to find them.

Typical Banewrack: CR 23; Large undead; HD 20d12; hp 130; Init +7; Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (average); AC 28, touch 12, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +20; Grp +41; Atk +36 melee (1d8+17 plus energy drain, slam) or +36 melee (1d8+17, bite); Full Atk +36 melee (1d8+17 plus energy drain, 2 slams) and +31 melee (1d8+17, bite); SA blood drain, energy drain, improved grab; SQ +8 turn resistance, damage reduction 15/silver, bludgeoning and magic, fast healing 5, gaseous form, resistance to cold 25 and electrical damage 25; AL CE; SV Fort +14, Ref +11, Will +9; Str 44, Dex 16, Con —, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +7, Climb +30, Craft (alchemy) +8, Handle Animal +8, Hide +7, Intimidate +21, Listen +11, Jump +28, Move Silently +11, Ride +16, Search +10, Sense Motive +9, Spot +11, Swim +27; Alertness[B], Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes[B], Dodge[B], Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative[B], Improved Trip, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes[B], Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack.

Blood Drain (Ex): The banewrack's blood drain attack deals 2d6 points of Constitution drain on a successful pin. On each such successful attack, the banewrack gains 15 temporary hit points.

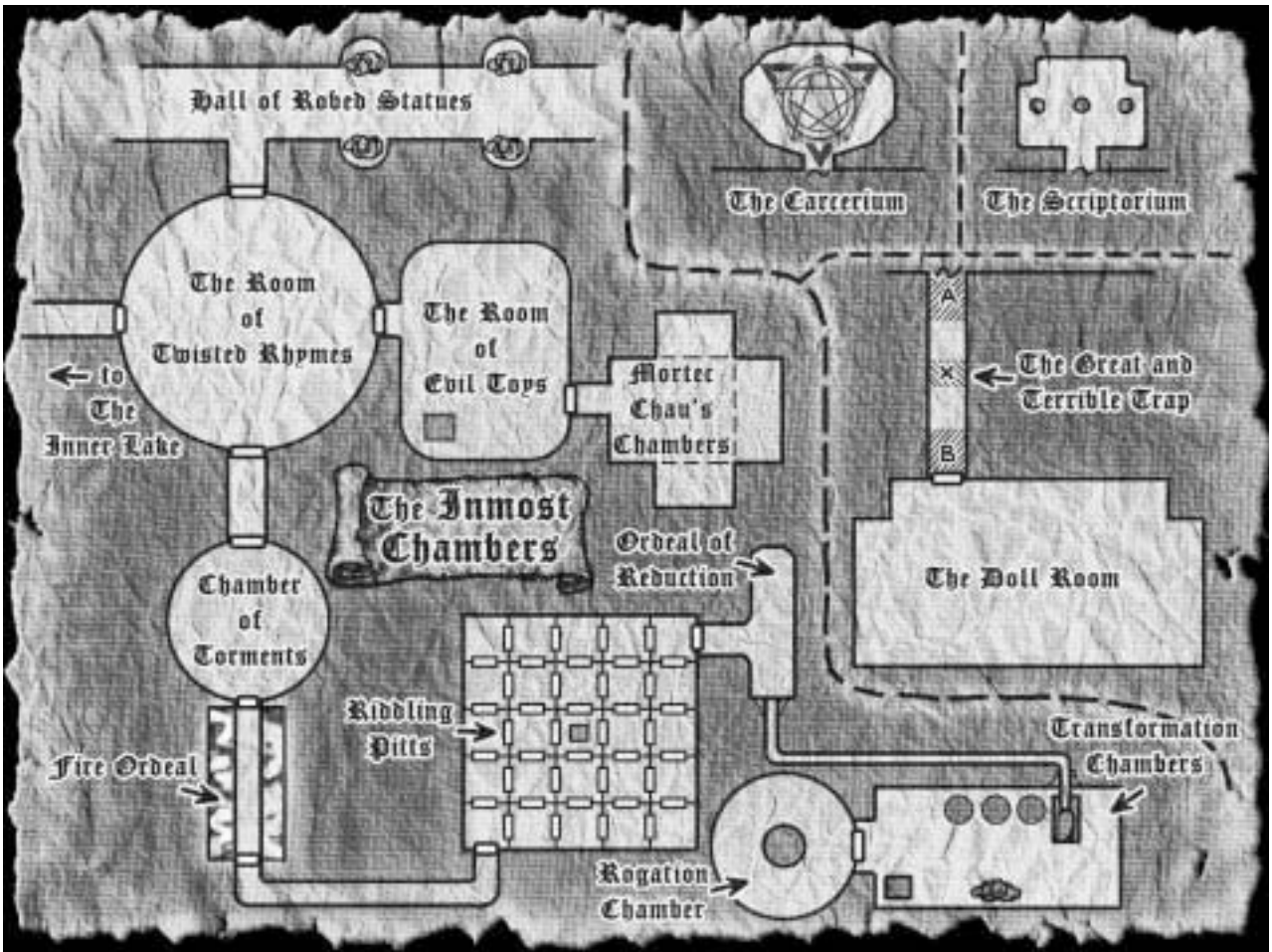
Energy Drain (Su): The banewrack's energy drain attack grants it ten temporary hit points for each negative level bestowed on its target. The target may remove the two negative levels imposed by the attack by succeeding on a Fortitude save (DC 18). The save DC is Charisma-based.

The Inmost Chambers

These are the rooms at the very heart of the Fortress where none but the Baneliness and her favourites may come, with the exceptions of candidates for elect status.

The Room of Twisted Rhymes

The walls and floor of this room are made from black stone. Above, two jagged-edged slabs meet at a tight seam



like a mouth firmly shut, closing off a circular shaft. Four doorways lead out of here, one in each compass direction. The northern door is metallic, the southern door is made from stone, the eastern door is sculpted in the shape of a laughing face and the western door is actually a double door, again constructed of stone.

The whole of the room is covered with anarchic daubs of glowing paint. Something has scribbled across the black walls in colours that stand out vividly: red, blue and lime green. The writing seems to be a stream of infantile obscene rhymes. Most of it deals with what the writer intends to do to 'Mother'. Other rhymes address the topics of dismembering bodies, the kinds of discharges produced by various diseases and the pleasure to be had in maiming small animals.

The Secret Script: One block of this scrawl is in fact a *secret page* (the 'page' being loosely interpreted here), which covers up the text beneath. This reads:

'Mother, forgive me. It is making me do this. I was not strong enough. I deserve annihilation.

'I have concealed it within Jasmine. Know her by her yellow hair and eyes'.

This is a malicious trap set by the Baneliness in case her mother manages to break this far into the Fortress. She intends to trick her into thinking the phylactery is hidden inside one of the dolls in the Room of Dolls, when all there is inside it is a trap.

The Flower Gate: The doorway to the north is made from solid adamantine. A pattern of intertwined flowers has been very faintly engraved into it. A Search check (DC 40) reveals that the centres of three of these flowers are slightly different from the rest. Each is faceted as if to receive a gem, whereas the others are bereft of detail.

These flowers are the keys to opening the door into the Baneliness's private sanctum. Only the three creatures she fully trusts, namely Lord Skraith, Mortec Chau and Mrs. Persimmon, may pass beyond here, and then only when all three act together. Each has a ring which must be set to the appropriate flower. The door then slides down with a sound like a sigh.

The Stone of Separation: The stone doorway to the south is a single flat panel of stone with an inscription marked into it. This reads:

'VONAN RUKH
'The Stone of Separation
'Beyond this threshold, only they may pass who would number themselves among the ELECT.

'Thou hast strength? It shall be rived from thee, as the flesh is rived from the bone.
'Thou hast wit? It shall be tested, even unto madness.
'Thou hast loyalty? Cling to it as the flame clings to the wood, for only the loyal shall pass.'

The door swings open when pushed lightly, too easily for a heavy stone door. It reveals a short hallway, at the end of which is a door covered in gold leaf, bearing a sunblaze design. This opens onto the Chamber of Torments (see the Labyrinth of Trial, below).

The Gate to the Play Rooms: The gateway to the east is a stone face resembling that of a merry gnome. The mouth is wide open and forms the doorway.

The Labyrinth of Trial

The Baneliness uses this run of rooms to test the vampires she selects to become members of the elect. If they can win through to the centre, she puts them through the transformation process. If they fail and somehow survive, they are publicly decapitated as examples to the rest.

Closing Doors: Many of the rooms have doors that close as soon as one character enters the area. This is because the labyrinth is designed to be passed through by a single vampire candidate, not by a group. The doors slide shut, are extremely difficult to wedge, and apply an equivalent Strength modifier of +20 when pushing any obstacles in their way. When a character enters a door that closes after him, a single adjacent character can attempt to leap through along with him if there is room. To do this he must succeed at a Tumble check (DC 50). If the check fails the character is dealt 10d6 points of crushing damage as the door slams him out of the way.

When a room is 'solved', all of its doors unlock, allowing other characters to enter and also allowing rooms already passed through to be revisited.

Games Master's Note: Some of the traps and puzzles in this section are designed to be fatal to undead, not to living creatures.

The Chamber of Torments

An inscription above the door reads:

'He who fears to face torment shall never know My grace;
'He who seeks to hide from My wrath shall burn from it.'

The door opens easily. When the Player Characters enter:

The room beyond the door is dark. You can make out a domed ceiling, with stone ribs arching up to a central bulge. Beneath it, the floor is tiled with something that clinks underfoot.

Examination reveals that this surface is glassy and reflective; the whole floor is tiled with mirrors. Once a single creature passes into the room, the door swings shut behind him and locks with a *wizard lock* (caster level 23rd). There is an ominous pause, then the room flares into brilliant light.

The stone bulge in the centre of the ceiling emits magically created sunlight which flashes back from the floor tiles. The next round the light dies completely, plunging the room into darkness. On the round after that it blazes brightly again. On the tenth round the sunlight stays alight for an entire minute. Any vampires in the room are disoriented by the sunlight and can take only a *single* move *or* attack action per round. If exposed to the sunlight for a second full round, they are destroyed.

On the far side of the room a four-inch-thick stone panel blocks the exit. The only way to pass through it is to batter it down with brute force or magic. It is airtight, with no way to use *gaseous form* to escape. Most vampires opt for brute force. The panel has a Break DC of 28, Hardness 8 and 60 hit points.

This room is an agonising ordeal for vampires. The Player Characters are likely to find it a mere curiosity.

The Fire Ordeal

An inscription above the door reads:

'Bare and rejoicing shall ye enter the presence of the Fire;
'Accursed be they who seek refuge in mere material things.'

The doorway is magically treated so as not to open for any creature who carries or wears any gear at all, even basic clothing. This magic doorway functions as a trap with *true seeing*. Attempting to smuggle gear past it by changing form does not work. The Player Characters must discard all their equipment and move ahead without even the protection of clothes. If they do so…

An intense heat makes your eyes sting. The room beyond the door is a hallway in triangular section, the walls sloping up at a sheer angle and meeting above your heads. A door similar to the one by which you entered is at the far end.

A single walkway of stone runs down the length of the hallway, with beds of red lava to either side of it. Teardrop-shaped masses of lava rise up from the beds in defiance of gravity, arching overhead and then slowly merging back into the lava on the opposite side.

Once all the Player Characters have entered the room, the door closes and locks behind them with a *wizard lock* as in the Chamber of Torments.

Antimagic: Bringing an *antimagic field* into this region has a chance to cancel the arching lava effect, which is powered as if it were a *telekinesis* spell (caster level 23rd). If this happens, gobbets of lava splash down upon the characters. The crucial objects remain at the bottom of the 10-foot-deep lava troughs, too far down to be visible.

Time Limit: This section is timed. The Player Characters have a grace period of two minutes (20 rounds) before the main hazard manifests. When the timer runs out, the lava begins to rise at a rate of six inches per round. If the Player Characters succeed in unlocking the door at the end of the room, the lava subsides before the door opens.

Objects in the Lava: Quick-eyed characters notice that some of the lava bubbles arching from one side to the other have objects in them. A Spot check (DC 30) is needed to notice each one among the flurry of floating lava. 1d3 objects are in the air at any one time. A character can grab the object by making a touch attack against an Armour Class of 14 and is automatically dealt 2d6 points of fire damage from lava if he does so, with another 1d6 points of damage on the next round.

These objects are all made from adamantine and are six inches across. They look like gaming pieces. Each has a curious rod-and-socket arrangement in the base, making it possible to join any object to any other.

The Baneliness, having partially retreated into a second childhood, has a love of rhyme. The trick to making it out of this room is to connect the rhyming objects with one another. When the appropriate objects are connected, they liquefy and merge into a new object (as described below) which can then be connected with other objects, finally resulting in a key. This key, when connected to the bee, morphs into the *real* key to the door at the end of the room.

If a character attempts to connect two objects that do not belong together, they break apart with a thunderous concussion that deals 20d6 points of sonic damage to all creatures within a 15-foot radius, with a Reflex save (DC 25) allowed for half damage. There are nine objects in all, with one of them (the bee) left until last. The object pairs are listed below. The Games Master should use the

description given rather than naming the objects, as the names give away the rhyming secret too easily. The objects should be found in a random order. They are:

- a knife blade broken off at the hilt, without a handle. (*blade*)
- a shovel or digging tool of some kind. (*spade*)
- a simple crown like that a monarch would wear. (*crown*)
- a figure like a dancing harlequin, with a painted smile and conical hat. (*clown*)
- a simple length of eighteen joined chain links. (*chain*)
- a human brain in miniature, missing the spinal cord. (*brain*)
- a model chair or throne with a crown embossed upon it. (*throne*)
- a miniature leg bone. (*bone*)
- a detailed replica of a honeybee. (*bee*)

The objects combine in pairs to form new items, as follows:

- **Blade and Spade combined:** a simple padlock. (*lock*)
- **Crown and Clown combined:** a mundane-seeming chunk of stone. (*rock*)
- **Chain and Brain combined:** a spiral unicorn horn. (*horn*)
- **Throne and Bone combined:** a hook-like barb, growing from a branch. (*thorn*)
- **Lock and Rock combined:** what appears to be a disembodied human heart. (*heart*)
- **Horn and Thorn combined:** a sharp missile with vanes. (*dart*)
- **Heart and Dart combined:** an adamantine key which looks as if it would fit the door at the end of the hallway.
- **Key and Bee combined:** a key much like the last; however, it is golden instead of adamantine. This key opens the door.

The Riddling Pits

This section is to test the wits of the candidates for elect status. The following diagram is found outside the room:

Marked on the door is a grid made up of twenty-five squares. An arrow points into the one at the bottom left corner and out from the square at the top right corner.

This is a simple map of the Riddling Pits. All of the rooms within the grid are of the same type:

The room you have entered is a cube of cold metal plates, each plate a foot across. The walls, floor and ceiling are armoured with them. To the north and east are identical doors closed off by metal panels. Each door is surmounted by a gargoyle-like face with eyes that pulse and bulge green like the throats of croaking frogs.

As soon as the room is entered, the faces all speak a riddle aloud. Nothing else happens unless someone speaks inside the room. Anything that is said, even in normal conversation, is taken as an attempt to answer the riddle, so the Games Master should be stringent with the players as to who is saying what, in or out of character.

The doors are magically treated and made from adamantine. They will not open for anything other than the correct answers. In addition, if a door registers damage, the room reacts as though a riddle has been answered incorrectly (see below).

The Central Room: This area is different from the others. In the room's centre is an altar in the form of two iron cubes, one on top of the other, with a chalice filled to the brim with fresh blood. This is intended as a reward and rest stop for any determined vampire who has made it this far. The chalice is enchanted with faint Necromancy magic and uses a variant on *gentle repose* to keep all blood placed in it from spoiling.

The Riddles: The riddles are given below. This section allows for some degree of choice, because the Player Characters can withdraw from a section if they cannot work out the answer and try a different one.

There are 25 riddles in total, one for each room. Remember that these are being asked from a vampire's perspective. Each one ends with the question 'What am I?'

1. *I am the river that brings life and is life. I am sweeter than honey and richer than wine. When I burst my banks, death sails swiftly upon me.* (Blood.)

2. *The high trees gave me my pale flesh. The deep sea gave me my black knowledge. My skin is the skin of a beast.* (A book: the writing is from squid ink, the pages from trees, the leather binding from cattle.)

3. *I am the flame that burns the unwary, and the curse that was once a blessing. I am life to the things above the earth and death to those who sleep below the earth.* (The sun.)

4. *I am a house of diamonds in the morning and of silver in the twilight; I have no rooms but many guests; one mistress do I have.* (A spiderweb.)

5. *I am the butcher of ones who cannot run; there is but one tooth in my head. I have brought the high and mighty low, yet he whom I serve is common, and no warrior.* (A woodsman's axe.)

6. *From the hour of my beginning, I yearn for a place far away, yet few follow me there; if it were not for my longing, many would be led astray.* (A compass needle.)

7. *I have nails but no fingers. I am beaten when I am but young; thereafter, I am trodden into the mud.* (A horseshoe)

8. *I am bound unto a silken predator. I follow one of the lords of the night. If my owner is displeased, I must be lashed.* (A cat's tail.)

9. *I am an illusionist who makes a new world. I am beloved by the vain, and yet I am honest. Strike me, and I make a thousand worlds.* (A mirror.)

10. *Cold crystal is my skin. Dry dust is my heart. Set me at my task: I give from myself to myself, until my heart is still.* (An hourglass.)

11. *I am a dwarf with a mighty belly, black as a mine. An extra leg have I, and a hat of iron.* (A cauldron.)

12. *I am held by a giant, still and silent in the shadow. Leave me be and I shall say nothing. Pull my tail and I cry aloud.* (A bell in a bell tower.)

13. *Many lives begin in me. Many lives end in me. I am the place where the mind falls into darkness, and where the mind springs to new life. The industrious shun me; the weary welcome me.* (A bed.)

14. *I am the sentinel who cries out a warning. I am crowned in blood. Many are the undead who dread to hear me.* (A cockerel.)

15. *I grew up in a soft bed indeed, yet it lay within prison walls. Although I was common dirt, and none have come to free me, I have become a thing of majesty and beauty.* (A pearl within an oyster.)

16. *The heavens lie above me and fire burns below me. My throat is black. My breath is dark and choking.* (A chimney.)

17. *Once, I spent my days with meat all around me. Now I smile, for I am grown lean.* (A skeleton.)

18. *They tear the skin from my flesh, they cut me with sharp knives, yet all the while they weep.* (An onion.)

19. *I am thin, but I strangle those greater than I. I poison the living and spread myself over the tombs of the dead.* (Ivy.)

20. *I am a milky lantern. When I am fat, I have no horns. Many cry out to me, but none shall touch me.* (The moon.)

21. *I can kill a hundred thousand men, yet a single child may carry me. None shall ever see me, for only through my works am I known.* (A plague.)

22. *I am a weapon cruel and sharp. I pierce one in the belly and yet he lives; I pierce another in the mouth and soon he dies.* (A fish-hook.)

23. *I am the thief whose head is white and whose body is brown. I steal away the mind, and yet men willingly invite me in.* (Beer.)

24. *I am many become one. I have no true life, and without death I could not be. I serve as well as bone and muscle may, and with as much wit.* (A flesh golem.)

25. *I have teeth but no jaw; I have a shank, but no belly; I may be cut, but I never bleed; my destiny is to be turned.* (A key.)

Answering the Riddles: The correct answer opens all the doors in the room.

An incorrect answer prevents the relevant door from opening. In such a case, that room is now done with; even if the correct answer is subsequently given, nothing happens. The incorrect answer also causes one of three additional things to happen:

- If there is pressure upon the floor, such as from characters standing on it, a pit opens beneath the characters' feet; beneath this is a 100-foot drop into boiling lava.

- If there is pressure upon the walls or ceiling, such as from a *spider climb* spell allowing a character to cling there, the surface undulates with an electric blast, dealing 30d6 points of electrical damage, with a Reflex save (DC 35) allowed for half damage.

- If there is no pressure against the walls at all, as in the case of a character flying in the centre of the room, the faces on the walls emit *antimagic cones* 30 feet in length (giving the effect of an *antimagic field* as cast by a 23rd level caster) and the pit mentioned above opens.

The Ordeal of Reduction

An inscription above the door to this room reads:

'We salute the loyal; we salute the true
'Who has passed through the torments of fire and light!
'One trial remains. Surrender the flesh,
'Approach your destiny prostrate, and be transformed.'

This room's door closes as soon as the first character passes through it, sealing and locking itself with the usual *wizard lock*:

This room is not at all like the others you have faced. It is as if you have accidentally wandered into a stretch of stinking sewer pipe. The walls are crude brick, the floor awash with slime and filthy water in which ominous ripples move. On the left-hand side the tunnel ends in a brick wall with a man-shaped depression in it, as if someone pressed himself into the bricks when the mortar was soft. On the right-hand side the tunnel ends in a narrow grate through which the water sloshes.

Examination of the depression in the left wall with a Search check (DC 10) reveals a very obvious set of blade traps set within the shoulders and hips of the shape. If a humanoid creature presses itself into this cavity, four flaming razor-edged discs whip out and sever its arms and legs, cauterising the wounds and preventing blood loss. This reduces the creature's hit points instantly to one-fifth of their previous total and deals 2d6 points of Constitution damage which cannot be recovered until the missing limbs are grown back. The creature must also make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or die outright from massive damage.

The limbless creature must now crawl through the slime and filth to the two-foot-wide grating. Its speed is reduced to five feet per round and it cannot run. While it moves, rats in the slime attack and bite it. The grating opens if a limbless creature comes adjacent to it, allowing the creature to shuffle into the grating and be borne down a slimy pipeline into the Chambers of Transformation. Any other characters who wish to follow must squeeze through the grating and slide down.

The Transformation Chambers

The pipe empties into a low trough into which the effluvium from above continually falls. The trough has a grating for a bottom. Through it you can see a shaft dropping down to darkness. From below echo inhuman howls and groans.

Nearby are three stone basins. An upright sarcophagus stands against the wall. Facing it on the opposite wall is a large tapestry depicting a skeletal creature who clutches a doll to her body with one hand and raises the other in an gesture of blessing; there is a broad black ring on one finger. In the room's southwest corner is an open furnace, in which something is burning that looks like it used to be alive. There are twin brass doors in the west wall.

Moving purposefully around the room, their arms swinging like clockwork toys, are small humanoid creatures like dwarves in loincloths, with jet-black skin. Their bellies are distended and hang over their thighs, and their heads are those of jackals. They carry unrecognisable implements.

The Creatures: There are four of these. They are the Abn Sukta, the surgeons of the dead (see Appendix 3). Their role is to carry out alterations and repairs to the Baneliness's undead legions. When a vampire survives this far, they operate upon him and enclose him within the sarcophagus for a week, after which he emerges as an elect vampire, a banewrack or a mess of dead bones and tissue.

If the Abn Sukta discover that a non-undead creature (such as a limbless Player Character) has fallen into their workroom, they prod and poke it for 1d4+1 rounds before deciding that it is useless to them and dragging it over to the furnace. They then attempt to burn it. If for some reason it does not burn, they haul it over to the grate, open it and drop it down into the drains.

If attacked, they waddle away and attempt to hide behind the basins. Combat alarms them and they take no part in it if they can help it.

The Grate: The grate is locked, although it can be picked with an Open Lock check (DC 40); the Abn Sukta have the keys. The shaft leads to the Mire of the Lost in the Drains section. This is where the Abn Sukta drop banewracks.

The Rogation Chamber

Behind the brass doors is the room where Lord Skraith himself invests new elect vampires with their weapons of rank:

The floor of this circular room is inlaid with an elaborate mosaic, the border of which is made up of thousands of bats with their wingtips touching, their eyes picked out in gold leaf.

A dark circle made from what look like obsidian tiles surrounds the inner disc, where a solitary figure stands. He is clearly a vampire, judging by his chalk-white skin and flaming red eyes, and he grins as if everything is eminently satisfactory.

If given a chance to speak, he declares:

'The trial was not meant for humans. It must be a rare mortal indeed who can come through it… rare enough to be respected and thus killed with honour. I thank you, bold mortal, for the joy you have brought me. At last, relief from the interminable monotony of this flaking bitch's service! The old weariness is gone! Defend yourself!'

With that, he attacks the Player Character whom he thinks most worthy. Lord Skraith fights to the death. He was formerly the Baneliness's bodyguard and accompanied her when she fled her mother with the Ebon Ring. Though evil, he has a warrior's honour code – he is lawful, unsuited to the chaos around him – and being defeated in an honest fight is the only way he can break free of the Baneliness.

Skraith's 'coffin' is hidden in a five-foot-deep circular pit directly beneath the stone disc on which he stands. The disc has a narrow crack around it, allowing his gaseous form to seep through. The pit contains a locked adamantine coffin, like those found in the elect vampire roosts (see page 122).

If Skraith is killed, he gazes silently at his slayer in gratitude and whispers *'Rosemary'* as he crumbles. This is to tell the Player Characters where to find the Baneliness's phylactery.

Lord Skraith, Male Human Vampire Ftr7/Blk10/Rog7: CR 26; Medium undead; HD 7d12 plus 10d12 plus 7d12+30; hp 199; Init +9; Spd 30 ft.; AC 43, touch 15, flat-footed 43; Base Atk +22; Grp +28; Atk +35 melee (1d8+13/19–20, *Telestai*) or +28 melee (1d6+6 plus energy drain, slam); Full Atk +35/+30/+25/+20 melee (1d8+13/19–20, *Telestai*) or +28 melee (1d6+6 plus energy drain, 2 slams); SA aura of despair, blood drain, children of the night, command undead, create spawn, dominate, energy drain, poison use, smite good 3/day, sneak attack +7d6, spells; SQ +4 turn resistance, alternate form, aura of evil, damage reduction 10/silver and magic, dark blessing, detect good, evasion, fast healing 5, gaseous form, resistance to cold 10 and electrical 10, spider climb, trap sense +2, uncanny dodge; AL LE; SV Fort +21, Ref +23, Will +21; Str 22, Dex 20, Con —, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 12 (20).

Skills & Feats: Bluff +24, Climb +11, Diplomacy +24, Handle Animal +9, Hide +31, Intimidate +19, Jump +10, Knowledge (religion) +12, Listen +22, Move Silently +13, Ride +13, Search +10, Sense Motive +11, Spot +21, Use Magic Device +11; Alertness[B], Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes[B], Dodge[B], Epic Will, Epic Toughness, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Disarm, Improved Feint, Improved Initiative[B], Improved Sunder, Lightning Reflexes[B], Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack.

Spells prepared (3/3/3/1, save DC 13 + spell level): 1st – *cause fear, doom, inflict light wounds;* 2nd – *bull's strength, death knell, shatter;* 3rd – *contagion, deeper darkness, inflict serious wounds;* 4th level: *freedom of movement.*

Alternate Form (Su): Lord Skraith can assume the shape of a dire wolf as a standard action. This ability is similar to a *polymorph* spell cast by a 12th level character, except that Skraith does not regain hit points for changing form. He must remain in this form for 12 hours.

Aura of Despair (Su): Lord Skraith radiates a malign aura that causes enemies within ten feet of him to take a -2 penalty on all saves.

Blood Drain (Ex): Lord Skraith can suck blood from a living victim with his fangs by making a successful grapple check. If he pins his foe, he drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On each such successful attack, he gains five temporary hit points.

Children of the Night (Su): Once per day, Lord Skraith can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms or a pack of 3d6 wolves as a standard action. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve Skraith for up to one hour.

Command Undead (Su): Lord Skraith commands undead as an 8th level cleric.

Create Spawn (Su): A humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain by Lord Skraith's energy drain rises as a vampire spawn 1d4 days after burial. If Skraith instead drains the victim's Constitution to zero or lower, the victim returns as a spawn if it had four or fewer Hit Dice and as a vampire if it had five or more Hit Dice.

Dominate (Su): Anyone Lord Skraith targets (a standard action) must succeed on a Will save (DC 27) or instantly fall under his influence as though affected by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Energy Drain (Su): Living creatures hit by Lord Skraith's slam attack gain two negative levels; a Fortitude save (DC 27) removes one of these negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, Skraith gains five temporary hit points. Skraith can use his energy drain ability once per round. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Fast Healing (Ex): Lord Skraith heals five points of damage each round so long as he has at least one hit point. If reduced to zero hit points in combat, he automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. He must reach his sarcophagus within two hours or be utterly destroyed; he can travel up to nine miles in two hours. Any additional damage dealt to Lord Skraith while he is in gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest in his coffin, Skraith is helpless. He regains one hit point after one hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of five hit points per round.

Gaseous Form (Su): As a standard action, Lord Skraith can assume gaseous form at will as per the *gaseous form* spell (caster level 5th), but he can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect manoeuvrability.

Smite Good (Su): Lord Skraith gains a +5 modifier to his attack roll and adds a +10 modifier to damage he deals against good foes.

Spider Climb (Ex): Lord Skraith can climb sheer surfaces as though with a *spider climb* spell.

Equipment & Treasure: +14 bracers of epic armour, cloak of epic charisma +8, ring of epic protection +8, Telestai (unholy despoiler). Lord Skraith also has a silver ring with a large yellowish gem, one of the three identical items that fits into the door of the Baneliness's private rooms to unlock it.

Telestai: This blade shows no outward sign of the evil that broods within it, appearing as a rather dull greenish sword, like copper tinged with verdigris. In the hands of any character other than a blackguard, *Telestai* performs as a *+3 unholy longswor*d. In the hands of a blackguard such as Lord Skraith, this weapon functions as a *+7 longsword of unholy power* and grants a +5 profane bonus on his saves against spells with the good descriptor or spells cast by good characters. If Lord Skraith smites good with *Telestai*, he adds 20 points to the damage dealt.

The Playrooms

This section is where the Baneliness comes to amuse herself when she has one of her 'insane child' fits. Mortec Chau keeps her company while she plays and tries to ensure that nothing gets broken.

The Room of Evil Toys

This area is decorated in hideously bright colours. The walls and ceiling are painted in lurid blue, with a smiling yellow sun above. The floor has been made into a landscape, with old carpets green with mildew thrown over mounds of some soft substance to create hills and valleys.

Plodding over the carpets towards you are three creatures: a bear, a humanoid doll the size of a human being, and a mule. They are obviously man-made, like gigantic toys. Their glass eyes, however, have looks of desperation, as if something is trapped behind them.

The Games Master should treat the toys as zombies for game purposes, but with Intelligence scores of 10. They are non-combatants. If they notice the Player Characters, the bear gives a gruff 'Hello, what do we have here?' and waddles over to investigate.

The toys are curious about the Player Characters and wonder if they will 'get in trouble' for 'playing with them'. After conversing for a while, the doll decides to go fetch the Quiet Man (Mortec Chau) from the back room. If there is any combat, the toys flee screaming for Mortec, who comes to investigate.

The toys are similar to golems. The souls of intelligent humanoids have been placed into them and they have been forced to play out their assigned roles. A Player Character who makes a Sense Motive check (DC 30) when talking to one can tell that it is trying to communicate something else: *I am trapped in this shell.*

If they are dismantled, the Player Characters find the remains of the humans whose souls went into them. The bear has the skeleton of a grown man inside its fur, the doll has a woman's bones among its stuffing and the mule has two sets of dwarf bones inside.

Concealed Vault: If the Player Characters move the carpets aside, they find even more carpets beneath them in piles and layers. Digging down far enough in the north-western corner of the room uncovers a stone door in the floor. Beneath this is a 10-foot-square room in which have been dumped the gleaming fragments of an automaton of some kind.

Examination reveals these to be the smashed remnants of a horse automaton made entirely from gold and diamonds, obviously once a treasure that an emperor would have been proud to own. The automaton is irreparable but the gold and jewels are worth 1,000,000 gold pieces. The Baneliness broke the automaton one day in a fit of rage and stashed the fragments here, feeling too remorseful to do anything else with them.

Mortec Chau's Chambers

These rooms smell of sandalwood incense. The walls that divide them are made from paper sandwiched between wooden slats. The floor underfoot is wood, not stone. Even the air feels warm. It is as if you have stepped from a demented nursery into a Kandang brothel.

Mortec Chau is a former monk who walks the planes seeking chaos that he can restore to order. He is an immortal who will never age. He is, in fact, the oddly calm man Skaahn the Shape of Fire saw become immortal at the Firefalls of Torrendo (see page 98). Mortec's method is one of patience, compassion and persistence.

In the Baneliness, Mortec sees a potential not for good – no lich could ever be that! – but for restored order. Her madness fascinates him and he is intent on finding a cure for it. Reciprocally, Mortec intrigues the Baneliness because of his resilience, his utter fearlessness and his wish to cure her. Much to the vampires' disgust, she has forbidden any member of her army to harm him (though several of them, being chaotic, have attempted to do so anyway) and has given him rooms in the Fortress.

Mortec plays with the lich on a daily basis. He is convinced that encouraging her to act out her 'mad child' side is helping her resist the Ebon Ring. She is building a reserve of *self* that she will be able to call on (or so Mortec hopes) to throw off its dominance.

If the Player Characters interfere with his plans without talking to him first, Mortec attempts to stop them, even if this means attacking them. He has worked hard to strengthen the Baneliness' will to throw off the Ebon Ring's influence, and will not let the Player Characters

put her on the defensive now and push her into calling on its power to protect herself:

'She may be evil, but there is room for evil in the universe as well as good. Everything has its place, even she. She is fulfilling a greater purpose than we know.'

Mortec Chau, Male Human Mnk16/HoW10: CR 26; Medium humanoid; HD 16d8+16 plus 10d8+10; hp 143; Init +6; Spd 80 ft.; AC 28, touch 28, flat-footed 23; Base Atk +19; Grp +21; Atk +26 melee (2d8+7/19–20, unarmed strike); Full Atk +26/+26/+26/+21/+16/+11 melee (2d8+7/19–20, unarmed strike flurry of blows); SA *ki* strike (magic, lawful, adamantine), quivering palm, spell-like abilities; SQ abundant step, ageless, darkvision 60 ft., diamond body, diamond soul, evasion, immune to fire, resistant to cold 20, slow fall 80 ft., still mind, tremorsense 30 ft., wholeness of body; AL LN; SV Fort +18, Ref +20, Will +23; Str 14, Dex 22 (14), Con 12, Int 13, Wis 29 (19), Cha 9.

Skills & Feats: Balance +9, Climb +20, Diplomacy +42, Escape Artist +12, Hide +22, Jump +8, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (geography) +9, Knowledge (religion) +7, Listen +17, Move Silently +19, Perform (zither) +6, Sense Motive +35, Spot +36, Survival +23, Tumble +10; Combat Expertise, Deflect Arrows[B], Dodge, Endurance, Epic Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Improved Critical (unarmed strike), Improved Disarm[B], Improved Unarmed Strike[B], Mobility, Power Attack, Righteous Strike, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Stunning Fist[B].

Spell-like Abilities (Sp): Dimension door once every 1d4 rounds (caster level 26th).

Mortec has the following horizon walker terrain mastery benefits:

Aligned (Planar): Mortec can mimic the dominant alignment of the plane. He incurs none of the usual penalties for having an alignment at odds with that of the plane, and is not affected by spells and abilities that harm those of the opposite alignment.

Cold (Planar): Mortec gains a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against outsiders and elementals with the cold subtype.

Desert: Mortec is immune to fatigue, and effects that would otherwise cause him exhaustion instead cause him to be fatigued. He gains a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against desert creatures.

Hills: Mortec has a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against hills creatures.

Mountains: Mortec gains a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against mountain creatures.

Plains: Mortec gains a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against plains creatures.

Shifting (Planar): Mortec gains a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against outsiders and elementals native to a shifting plane.

Underground: Mortec gains a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against underground creatures.

Weightless (Planar): Mortec receives +30 foot bonus to his flying speed on planes with no gravity or subjective gravity; he also gains a +1 insight bonus on attack and damage rolls against creatures native to the Astral Plane, the Elemental Plane of Air or the Ethereal Plane.

Equipment & Treasure: Amulet of mighty fists +5, gloves of epic dexterity +8, periapt of epic wisdom +10, ring with yellow jewel (one of the three keys to the Baneliness' door), bluish-white pebble (this is not magical, just a stone from the very top of a mountain that Mortec picked up as a souvenir).

Mortec is remarkable for how ordinary he looks. He is a dark-haired man of middle age in a simple travelling outfit. If the Player Characters spend some time talking peacefully with Mortec, they can learn the following:

- He is determined to help the Baneliness through gentle persuasion and conversation. He knows the Ebon Ring is dominating her but is heartened that it has not managed to destroy her yet. He believes this means he is close to a breakthrough.

- He does not think the Baneliness can remove the ring willingly. It has grown into her undead flesh. However, the Player Characters might be able to sever it from her, if she were to be defeated.

- He will not help the Player Characters destroy the Baneliness unless it becomes clear that there is no hope. If they demonstrate to him that she is completely lost, then he will reluctantly aid them in attacking her.

The Baneliness' Sanctuary

When the rings from Mortec Chau, Mrs. Persimmon and Lord Skraith are applied to the depressions in the Flower Gate, it swings open silently, revealing a long hallway.

The Hall of Robed Statues

The vaulted corridor seems to go on and on into infinity to the left and right. Along the length of the corridor are alcoves containing fifteen-foot-high female figures made from a stone like rose quartz, with smooth featureless heads. Each is draped in a different gown, one of purple satin, one of black velvet, one of smooth white linen, another of pale blue gauze. They all stand in curious contrived poses, as if dancing.

This hall is an infinite loop, a planar paradox kept manifest only because the Baneliness wills it to be. As soon as the Player Characters move from the entry point, it disappears and cannot be found again. To exit this hall, they must find the appropriate statue and activate it.

The Faceless Footman: This corridor is the home of Hobyah, a sworn servant of the Baneliness, who patrols it and ensures that the statues are kept free from dust. He looks like a mannequin in an outfit suited to a palace flunky. Like the statues, his head is smooth, white and faceless. He communicates with exaggerated miming actions.

Hobyah is an extremely unusual construct called a porcelain dandy (see Appendix: New Monsters). He is not so vulgar as to attack but has no hesitation about alerting his mistress if he encounters intruders in the sanctuary. He does, however, question the Player Characters very thoroughly (through mime, of course) as to their business here. If he has difficulty making himself understood, he produces ink and parchment and writes down his side of the conversation in an elegant hand. He may even conduct the Player Characters to the appropriate doorkeeper if he does not believe they are a serious threat. It amuses the mistress to have new toys to play with.

Doorkeepers: Some of these statues are doorkeepers, who allow access into rooms off the main corridor. Doorkeepers can be identified by their strong aura of Transformation magic alone. Nothing else gives any clue to their nature. To activate a doorkeeper, one need only say the word 'Open':

The robed figure begins to move. It bows before you and reaches up to pull open its robe. Behind the robe, a softly shimmering doorway is now visible.

The rooms below are all accessed via a doorkeeper.

The Carcerium

Smoky flames mark the perimeter of a magic circle on the floor. Within the circle is a powerfully built fiend, his horns glinting in the red light, sneering with defiant pride. His expression changes to one of surprise as he sees you.

This room is a prison for one of Azrique's allies, Achaman, a pit fiend who came here on an assassination mission. He was captured and now lies here under the effects of a *binding* spell, awaiting death.

The Binding: Achaman has been placed under a *binding* spell (CL 23rd) of the Hedged Prison type.

Negotiations with Achaman: The fiend wants out. He no longer owes Azrique anything; he made his attempt, found that he was up against forces more powerful than even he could handle and was trapped here and humiliated. If the Player Characters ask what thwarted him, he evades the issue before 'admitting' that it was Bridge, the flesh colossus. This is in fact a lie. Achaman fell afoul of the Great and Terrible Trap and was overcome as he lay groaning. Achaman does not want to forewarn the Player Characters about the trap, partly because he is angry that it caught him and partly because he might need to trick them into walking through it in order to escape a promise of assistance.

Achaman implies, rather than stating outright, that he will help to destroy the Baneliness if the Player Characters free him. If that does not work, he says that he will fly back to Azrique and tell her to start the attack, as the Player Characters are so close to their enemy. It could be a useful distraction. Finally he promises (by the four rivers of Hell) to grant a *wish* to whoever frees him.

Achaman's trustworthiness is entirely up to the Games Master and should depend on how rough a time of it the Player Characters have had up to now. If they badly need allies and support, Achaman can swear a binding oath to aid them. If they are doing well, he can make less binding agreements and then turn on them at the first opportunity.

Achaman, Male Pit Fiend: CR 26; Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful); HD 30d8+270; hp 405; Init +13; Spd 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (average); AC 41, touch 18, flat-footed 32; Base Atk +30; Grp +47; Atk +43 melee (2d8+14, claw); Full Atk +43 melee (2d8+14, 2 claws) and +43 melee (2d6+7, 2 wings) and +43 melee (4d6+7 plus poison plus disease, bite) and +43 melee (2d8+7, tail slap); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA constrict 2d8+28, fear aura, improved grab, spell-like abilities, *summon devil;* SQ damage reduction 15/good and silver, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire and

poison, regeneration 5, resistance to acid 10 and cold 10, see in darkness, spell resistance 38, telepathy 100 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +26, Ref +26, Will +31; Str 38, Dex 28, Con 28, Int 26, Wis 26, Cha 26.

Skills & Feats: Balance +10, Bluff +41, Climb +35, Concentration +41, Diplomacy +22, Disguise +41 (+43 acting), Hide +38, Intimidate +43, Jump +41, Knowledge (arcana) +41, Knowledge (nature) +22, Knowledge (religion) +41, Knowledge (the planes) +41, Listen +41, Move Silently +42, Search +29, Spellcraft +43, Spot +41, Survival +20 (+22 on other planes, +22 when tracking), Tumble +44; Blinding Speed (2), Cleave, Epic Will, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Improved Multiattack, Iron Will, Multiattack, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*fireball*).

Note: Achaman's natural weapons are treated as evil-aligned and lawful-aligned for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Constrict (Ex): Achaman deals 2d8+28 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

Disease (Su): A creature struck by a Achaman's bite attack must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 28) or be infected with devil chills (incubation period 1d4 days, damage 1d4 Strength). The save DC is Constitution-based.

Fear Aura (Su): Achaman can radiate a 20-foot-radius fear aura as a free action. Any creature in the area must succeed on a Will save (DC 27) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell (caster level 18th). A creature who successfully saves cannot be affected again by Achaman's aura for 24 hours. Other devils are immune to the aura. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Achaman must hit with his tail slap attack. He can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he wins the grapple check, he establishes a hold and can constrict.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude save (DC 28), initial damage 1d6 Constitution, secondary damage death. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Regeneration (Ex): Achaman takes normal damage from good-aligned silvered weapons and from spells or effects with the good descriptor.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *blasphemy* (DC 25), *create undead*, *fireball* (DC 21), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *invisibility*, *magic circle against good*, *mass hold monster* (DC 27), *persistent image* (DC 23), *power word stun*, *unholy aura* (DC 26); 1/day – *meteor swarm* (DC 27). The caster level is 18th and the save DCs are Charisma-based. Once per year Achaman can use *wish* as the spell (caster level 20th).

Summon Devil (Sp): Twice per day Achaman can automatically summon two lemures, bone devils or bearded devils or one erinyes, horned devil or ice devil. This ability is the equivalent of an 8th level spell.

The Scriptorium

This chamber looks like it must once have been a small, pillared place like a minor temple. Now, however, something peculiar has happened. The walls and ceiling of this room are thick with sheets of parchment with writing on it. It seems at first that this has been pasted onto the walls, but a second glance reveals that the room seems to be made of the sheets. They have been pulled away in places, taking chunks out of the walls. Beneath the peeled sheets are more sheets, partly crumbled like old bricks.

The floor underfoot is… leathery. It seems to be made from compressed book covers.

On a whim, the Baneliness transformed her library into a room that was *made* of books, instead of a room with books in it. She sometimes wanders here, pulling pages off and reading at random. Player Characters who spend time peeling off the sheets and searching for interesting items can find one of the following, most of which are spells ripped from old spellbooks effectively forming scrolls of the spells in question, with each successful Search check (DC 30):

- a *scroll of maximised chain lightning* (CL 24)
- a *scroll of extended time stop* (CL 26)
- a *scroll of heightened mass hold person* (heightened to level 10, CL 26th)
- a *scroll of intensified fireball* (CL 28)
- a *scroll of explosive runes* (CL 28)
- a *scroll of sepia snake sigil* (CL 28)
- a diary entry from one of the Baneliness' old journals, written before she became a lich (reproduced in the sidebar).

The Cavity: If the Player Characters dig a full ten feet into the packed mass of book covers they encounter a cavity that contains several magical books. These were strong enough to survive the transformation intact. The Baneliness did not even notice that they were there. The mass is thick enough to block *detect magic*. The books are as follows: *manual of bodily health +5, manual of gainful exercise +3, manual of quickness in action +2, tome of clear thought +3, tome of leadership and influence +3, tome of understanding +3*. There were originally more of these useful books, but the Baneliness cherry-picked the best of them for herself.

The Diary Entry

'Mother is ready to undergo her transformation. My heart is bitter with envy. Although she has promised that I, too, will be taught the art of creating a phylactery and binding away my soul in return for the gifts of everlasting life and power over the things of bone and ash, the day cannot come soon enough for my liking.

'I am told that I am not ready, that I am not responsible, that I cannot handle power. Damn her. One day, I will outmatch her in power. She chides me for my dolls, for my love of Rosemary. She says I am sentimental. Ha! That limp thing of rags has been a friend to me. She never has. If she thinks me sentimental, she should attend the interrogations that Captain Skraith and I have been carrying out.

'Let the secrets be folded away. Watch and wait, girl. The time will come. I will know my moment and seize it.'

The Great and Terrible Trap

The doorway in the statue leads into a simple stone corridor, five feet across. After fifty feet it ends in a wooden door, very much like all the other doors in the fortress, except that it actually is *made from wood and not from stone with a wood-like texture.*

The Baneliness wants to make utterly sure that her mother is destroyed when she comes here, so she has prepared an elaborate and excessive trap. This trap is actually several traps in one, all of them designed to go off when the victim passes into the corridor from the hallway. The exact trigger point is marked on the map with an X. It is easy for the Baneliness to bypass the trap, as she controls the matter of the Fortress; she can simply suppress it mentally.

The Baneliness has put years of time and effort into this, including the difficulty of tracking down a supply of holy water. If the Player Characters trigger the trap, she becomes furious and screams that 'It was not meant for you!' from the next room. Like a child having a tantrum, she then hurls herself at them and attacks with all the force she can. After three rounds she recovers herself and uses *teleport* to withdraw to the Doll Room.

The Traps

The following traps are all triggered simultaneously when a character reaches the indicated spot:

- *Mage's disjunction* trap: magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); automatic reset; spell effect (*mage's disjunction*, 24th level sorcerer, Will save (DC 27) negates); area

effect (40-ft.-radius burst); Search DC 34, Disable Device DC 34.

- Rocks fall at points A and B, blocking off the tunnel completely; mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; Reflex save (DC 35) avoids; damage 25d6 bludgeoning; multiple targets (all targets in adjacent 5-ft. squares); Search DC 40, Disable Device DC 40.

- Deluge of holy water (harmless to non-undead and non-evil outsiders); mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; Reflex save (DC 35) partly avoids (splash 2d6 damage); ten gallons of holy water (20d6 damage to undead and evil outsiders); multiple targets (all targets in adjacent 5-ft. squares), Search DC 40, Disable Device DC 40.

- Multiple impaling spearheads of *anarchic power* from the walls on either side; mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; Atk +24 melee (damage 1d8+20 plus special against chaotic, 1d10 spearheads); single target; Search DC 40, Disable Device DC 40.

- Descending adamantine plate in ceiling; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; onset delay (one round); never misses; damage 40d6 bludgeoning; Search DC 40, Disable Device DC 40.

The Doll Room

As you enter this enormous tower-like room, thousands of pairs of glassy eyes stare back at you, mindless and inanimate; brown eyes, blue eyes, green eyes, eyes gone nacreous with age. The smell is of musty cloth, like old clothes left for too long in an attic room.

The place is filled with dolls. They sit on old boxes, hang from thread, stand inside glass cases. Bodiless heads stare with single eyes. The walls are lined with them, rank after rank, silently watching you. They vary in size from tiny porcelain creatures to three-foot effigies the size of children, some carved in wood, some made from rags, some exquisite examples of the dollmaker's craft, some ugly and broken – or perhaps they were made that way. Each has a nameplate in front of her, some of them illegible due to age and encrusted filth.

The Baneliness has used *shape change* to assume the form of a doll (animated object) and is lurking on the very top shelf, sixty feet up. She uses *illusory double* to interact with the Player Characters if she needs to.

Finding the Phylactery

If Azrique briefed the Player Characters, they know that the Baneliness has her phylactery hidden inside a doll. It may be one of these, but which one? The phylactery has been treated with *nondetection*, meaning that the caster of any Divination magic that has the intent of locating it must make a successful caster level check (DC 38) for the magic to succeed. Even then, 'phylactery' is not a type of object that *locate object* can detect, as phylacteries are made in many different forms.

Jasmine: If the Player Characters look for a doll with yellow hair and eyes, following the *secret page* instructions in the Room of Twisted Rhymes, they can find one with a difficult Search check (DC 20). The doll is clearly old, with a cloth body and limbs made of china. Her nameplate is unreadable but she is the only doll in the room who matches the description. She is trapped with a *greater ruin* spell trap intended for Azrique to find and trigger. The Baneliness does not have the magical capacity to make such traps; it was built for her on commission.

Greater Ruin trap: single target; damage 35d6 (Fortitude save (DC 25) halves); search DC 35; Disable Device DC 35.

Rosemary: This nondescript doll with pink hair and a rose-coloured dress contains the Baneliness' phylactery. The Player Characters can learn her name from Lord Skraith or from the page from the Baneliness' journal in the Scriptorium.

The Baneliness, Female Human Lich Sor23: CR 25; Medium undead (formerly human); HD 23d12; hp 149; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 32, touch 13, flat-footed 29; Base Atk +12; Grp +14; Atk +14 melee (1d8+8 negative energy (Will save for half damage) plus paralysis, touch); Full Atk +14 melee (1d8+8 negative energy (Will save for half damage) plus paralysis, touch); SA fear aura, paralysing touch, spells; SQ +4 turn resistance, damage reduction 15/bludgeoning and magic, immunity to cold, electrical damage, mind-affecting attacks and *polymorph*; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +10, Will +18; Str 15*, Dex 17*, Con -, Int 15, Wis 21*, Cha 27*.

*Includes +5 inherent bonus from magical *tomes* and *manuals* (see the Scriptorium).

Skills & Feats: Bluff +26, Concentration +26, Craft (doll making) +26, Knowledge (arcana) +26, Spellcraft +26; Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (Abjuration), Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Spell Capacity, Maximise Spell, Permanent Emanation (*repulsion*), Spell Focus (Abjuration), Spell Penetration.

Note: The Baneliness is surrounded by a permanent *repulsion* effect. Any creature within or entering her designated *repulsion* radius (her choice, maximum 230 feet) must attempt a Will save (DC 26). If it fails, the

creature is unable to move toward her. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Damage: The Baneliness has a touch attack that uses negative energy to deal 1d8+5 points of damage to living creatures; a Will save (DC 29) halves the damage. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Fear Aura (Su): The Baneliness is shrouded in a dreadful aura of death and evil. Any creature of less than five Hit Dice in a 60-foot radius who looks at her must succeed on a Will save (DC 29) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell cast by a 23rd level sorcerer. A creature who successfully saves cannot be affected again by her aura for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Paralysing Touch (Su): Any living creature the Baneliness hits with her touch attack must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 29) or be permanently paralysed. *Remove paralysis* or any spell that can remove a curse can free the victim but the effect cannot be dispelled. Anyone paralysed by the Baneliness seems dead, though a Spot check (DC 20) or Heal check (DC 15) reveals that the victim is still alive. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Spells known (6/8/8/8/14/7/7/7/7/6/1, save DC 18 + spell level): 0th – *acid splash, arcane mark, dancing lights, detect magic, mage hand, message, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st – *magic missile, protection from good, ray of enfeeblement, shield, true strike;* 2nd – *blur, eagle's splendour, protection from arrows, resist energy, scorching ray;* 3rd – *dispel magic, displacement, lightning bolt, protection from energy;* 4th – *black tentacles, detect scrying, fear, stoneskin;* 5th – *baleful polymorph, cloudkill, cone of cold, feeblemind;* 6th – *flesh to stone, greater dispel magic, repulsion;* 7th – *delayed blast fireball, mass hold person, reverse gravity;* 8th – *polar ray, prismatic wall, protection from spells;* 9th – *foresight, imprisonment, prismatic sphere;* 10th – (used only for metamagic).

Equipment & Treasure: +14 bracers of epic armour, amulet of the dollmaker, ring of spell turning, ring of wizardry IV, staff of the magi.

The Baneliness is a skeletal female figure in a gown of white satin. Her scarlet hair is as long as a bridal train and drags along behind her in the dust.

Destroying the Ebon Ring

If they do not choose to give the Ebon Ring to Azrique, the Player Characters can research a means to destroy it forever. Due investigation, such as Bardic Lore checks (DC 45) and the use of *contact other plane*, produces the answer. The Ring can only be destroyed if it is crushed between the jaws of the being that created it.

If the Player Characters want to end the threat of the Ring, they must travel to the Negative Plane, find the ruins of the Carnifex's asteroid fortress and locate the drifting remains of the Carnifex itself. Azrique alone knows where the ruins are to be found, so the Player Characters must somehow trick or force the information out of her.

Crushing the ring between the Carnifex's dead jaws is easy, once his corpse is found. However, if the Games Master wants a truly challenging end to this episode, he should proceed as follows:

The Player Characters find the intact remains of the Carnifex floating amid the hanging rocks. As they draw closer, it begins to twitch and stir; *the presence of the Ebon Ring revives it.*

It was never truly destroyed, merely bound in eternal torpor. Its mother could not bear to kill it, even after what it had done. She took the Ring from it and hurled it away into the void. Ironically, if it had lain a little closer to the Carnifex, its force would have revived it. Instead, thousands of years of torpor passed before Azrique found the Ring and claimed it for herself.

Amulet of the Dollmaker

This unique artefact is usable only by the Baneliness. She may summon one doll swarm every 1d4 rounds as a standard action. She may control a maximum of 11 swarms at a time. The dolls are construct creatures. In combat she sends her doll swarms in to engage the Player Characters while bombarding them with spells from a distance.

Doll Swarm: Tiny construct (swarm); HD 12d10; hp 66; Init +10; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20, touch 18, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +9; Grp —; Atk (3d6, swarm); Full Atk (3d6, swarm); Space/Reach 10 ft./0 ft.; SA distraction; SQ magic immunity, damage reduction 15/epic and adamantine, darkvision 60 ft, swarm traits; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +7; Str 1, Dex 22, Con —, Int 6, Wis 13, Cha 1.

Skills & Feats: Hide +19, Listen +10, Spot +10; Improved Initiative, Iron Will.

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature who begins its turn with a doll swarm in its space must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 16) or be nauseated for one round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

The Ebon Ring of the Carnifex

This artefact is a band of black metal with flickering pale runes moving across its surface. These runes are a litany of curses against all things that sit proud in their high stations revelling in their lives and prosperity.

The Ebon Ring has an *ad hoc* Ego score of 35. Its purpose is to push the wielder to achieve more and more power while entrenching his defences so that the Ring will not be retrieved. It attempts to dominate any creature who wears it, forcing it to take on the role of an isolationist tyrant. It fuses itself with the flesh of its wearer, making it impossible to remove by a disarm attempt. The Ring has to be hacked off before it can be removed.

The Ebon Ring has the following powers:

Apocalypse: The wielder of the Ebon Ring can attempt to channel its power into a massive vortex of negative energy which has the potential to annihilate whole worlds if they are not negative-dominant. This requires a Spellcraft check (DC 100) and renders the Ring inert for 1d4 months. If the Spellcraft check is failed, the backlash of destructive energies utterly destroys the wielder, with no chance of escape.

Armouring: The Ring confers a +10 profane bonus to Armour Class.

Control of Reality: The Ring conveys mastery of reality within a region one mile in diameter, effectively treating the plane where the wielder stands as being divinely morphic with the wielder acting as its deity. The wielder may decide how this subsection of the plane is aligned, what its gravity is and what magic is suppressed or enhanced there. He may rearrange its contents as he pleases. He may not, however, make sudden changes to the plane or use the plane's geography to make attacks, though he can arrange conditions so that they are unfavourable to intruders. For example, he cannot cause a rock to fall from the sky and strike a target, but he can destabilise a mountain pass so that it becomes dangerous to navigate. Any major change requires 24 hours to instigate. This power of the Ebon Ring does not override that of an actual deity, who can impose his will upon any part of the affected area and restore it to normal.

Negative Energy Reinforcement: If the wielder is himself undead, he gains +4 turn resistance. The DC of saves against any of his supernatural abilities that employ negative energy (such as a vampire's energy drain or a lich's paralysing touch) is increased by two. If the wielder is not undead, he gains four negative levels when he puts on the ring. These negative levels never result in actual level loss but cannot be removed while the ring is worn.

Size Alteration: The Ring can alter its size to fit any potential bearer. Giants or pixies can wear it with equal ease.

Spell-like Abilities: This ring conveys use of the following spell-like abilities upon the wielder, as if by a 30th level caster: At will – *finger of death, vampiric touch;* 10/day – *energy drain;* 5/day –*symbol of death, wail of the banshee;* 3/day – *soul bind.* A soul captured by *soul bind* is trapped in the Ring rather than in a gem; unless the Ring is destroyed within one week of the soul's extraction, the trapped soul is consumed and completely destroyed.

Undead Control: The wielder's capacity to control undead is tripled; he may control three times as many Hit Dice of undead as he normally can. Checks made to rebuke undead are made as if the wielder were four levels higher than he is.

The Carnifex is an atropal, the closest thing there is to an undead demigod. This monster is far too challenging for the Player Characters to handle at their current levels. If they are to defeat it, the entire Assembly must be called upon to help. The Carnifex pursues fleeing characters back to the Skull of Paithah, as it can feel the presence of the Ring anywhere in the multiverse. Now that it has awakened, it wants its property back.

The Carnifex (Atropal, Abomination): Large undead (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful); CR 30; HD 66d12; hp 792; Init +6; Spd 5 ft., fly 240 ft. (perfect); AC 51, touch 11, flat-footed 49; Base Atk +33; Grp +53; Atk +49 melee touch (2d6 Con drain/19-20, touch); Full Atk +49 melee touch (2d6 Con drain/19-20, 2 touches) and +30 ranged touch (energy drain/19-20, eye ray); Space/Reach 10 ft/10 ft.; SA constitution drain, energy drain (2d4 negative levels, Fort DC 59), spell-like abilities, *summon nightcrawler;* SQ abomination traits, damage reduction 15/good and epic and silver, negative energy aura, rebuke/command undead, regeneration 20, spell resistance 42, undead traits; AL LE; SV: Fort +22, Ref +26, Will +43; Str 43, Dex 15, Con –, Int 28, Wis 22, Cha 42.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +85, Concentration +85, Diplomacy +97, Hide -2, Jump +1, Intimidate +91, Knowledge (arcana, history, religion, the planes) +78, Listen +77, Search +78, Sense Motive +75, Spellcraft +84, Spot +77; Alertness, Cleave, Devastating Critical (touch), Dodge, Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (touch), Improved Critical (eye ray), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Overwhelming Critical (touch), Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability, Run, Spring Attack, Undead Mastery, Weapon Focus (touch), Weapon Focus (eye ray), Whirlwind Attack, Zone of Animation.

The Carnifex's natural weapons are treated as epic, evil and lawful-aligned for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will: *animate dead, blasphemy, create greater undead, create undead, cone of cold, desecrate, greater dispelling, finger of death, improved invisibility, plane shift, slay living, speak with dead, spectral hand, teleport without error, unholy aura*; 5/day: *haste, project image, weird.* Caster level is 30th; saving throw DC is 26 + spell level. The saving throw DCs are Charisma-based.

Rebuke/Command Undead (Su): The Carnifex can rebuke or command undead as a cleric of 72nd level.

Negative Energy Aura (Su): A 30-foot-radius spread negative energy aura spreads from the Carnifex. All undead in the field (including the Carnifex itself) are treated as if having turn resistance +20 and a negative energy version of fast healing 20. Living creatures in the aura are treated as having ten negative levels unless they have some sort of negative energy protection or protection from evil. Creatures with 10 or fewer HD or levels perish (and, at the Carnifex's option, rise as spectres under the Carnifex's command 1 minute later).

Constitution Drain (Su): When the Carnifex hits a living opponent with a touch attack, the opponent takes 5 points of permanent Constitution drain, or 10 points on a critical hit. The Carnifex heals 20 points of damage, or 40 points on a critical hit, whenever it drains Constitution, gaining any excess as temporary hit points. These temporary hit points last a maximum of 1 hour. The attack allows a Fortitude saving throw (DC 59). The DC is Charisma-based.

Energy Drain (Su): When the Carnifex hits with a ranged touch attack (a ray of darkness that it shoots from one eye to a range of 400 feet), the resultant energy drain bestows four negative levels, or eight negative levels on a critical hit. For each negative level bestowed on an opponent, the Carnifex heals 10 points of damage, or 20 on a critical hit, gaining any excess as temporary hit points. These temporary hit points last a maximum of 1 hour. After 24 hours have passed, the afflicted opponent must attempt a Fortitude saving throw (DC 59) for each negative level. If successful, the negative level goes away with no harm to the creature; otherwise, the creature's level decreases by one. The DC is Charisma-based.

Regeneration (Ex): The Carnifex takes normal damage from good weapons or sentient weapons (or otherwise living weapons).

Summon Nightcrawler (Sp): Five times per day, the Carnifex can summon a nightcrawler.

The bulbous head of the Carnifex, nodding above its manikin body, makes it look like a horrible parody of an unborn child. The ropy umbilical cord completes the image. Unlike a baby, it has teeth; the yellow teeth of a long-buried mummy, its withered lips shrunken back in an eternal snarl.

Seeds of Destruction, Part II – The Staff

The Banestaff is an artefact created by Zaun, an artificer of the world of Garwyth. Its legendary evil was supposed to be destroyed by a group of heroes but their failure has prompted the King to deal with it in quite a different way. He has called in the cosmic waste disposal experts, the Sklavadok, to take care of his problem.

Where to Start: Again, Jasmeera is a knowledgeable source. She is willing to share what she knows with the Player Characters, so long as they understand that they will therefore be in her debt. The Player Characters can also gain some specific information from Lady Myonatix or the Sylvan Covenant. None of these factions share their information unless their relations with the Player Characters are good.

The Legend of the Banestaff

The general information below can be had with a successful Bardic Lore check (DC 30).

General Information: The artificer Zaun despised religion above all else. He loathed the arbitrary restrictions that gods placed upon mortals and hated the thought that he could, perhaps, be nothing more than a playing piece in some divine game, for all his perception of free will. He thus made up his mind to find the dwelling place of the gods and destroy it.

To this end he created the Banestaff, investing into it all the destructive power that he could summon. The staff was a botched, ugly thing like a cross between a tree branch and a frog's limb, pulsing with unnatural life. Zaun tested the Banestaff by destroying a small island off the coast of Carolus Magna, his world's main continent, then made his way to the plane where the gods lived, determined to shatter it to pieces.

No word of Zaun's final fate has ever been heard. All that is known is that the world of Garwyth suffered from thunderstorms for a week, after which the Banestaff fell from the sky, blackened and smoking like a burned length of timber, with a single skeletal hand clutching it. Divinations revealed that it was still as potent as ever.

Whether Zaun destroyed his gods or not is unknown, but Garwyth's priests were thenceforth unable to work any divine magic. Only those clerics who served an idea rather than a deity were able to cast divine spells. Some contend that the offended gods had not been destroyed but had merely gone to seek a world where their worshippers were not so ungrateful. Others believe that they fled their homes in fear for their lives and now dwell in some unknown part of the cosmos.

The Banestaff passed into the possession of King Ambric, the ruler of Carolus Magna, who had to defend it from the greed of ambitious diabolists and other undesirables who took advantage of the absence of clerics to seek necromantic power for themselves. As far as anyone knows, it is still in his possession.

It can only be destroyed by taking it to the city of Loshim and immersing it in the body of the Scaldri.

Jasmeera's Information: According to insider gossip, the King has recently been seen conversing with some very strange people dressed in ragged clothes and smelling terrible. Rumour has it that the Banestaff is no longer kept within the palace. Perhaps they were agents of the enemy in disguise?

Fangthane Vespian's Information: The King's champion, a paladin called Thomas of Birchdale who has been a friend to the Sylvan Covenant in the past, is unhappy with his monarch's recent decisions. On a recent visit to the Summerlands, he claimed that the King was taking a 'quick and easy path' instead of dealing with a problem the proper way. He did not say what it was that troubled him, but he did imply that the King had been frightened by the recent planequake and wanted to get rid of an old threat to the kingdom as quickly as possible.

Lady Myonatix's Information: Lady Myonatix visited Garwyth last week to see if anyone needed help dealing with the aftermath of the planequake. The citizens were grateful for her help, but she noticed something extremely odd. The previous time she had visited Brescau, the capital city of Carolus Magna, it had been a half-destroyed disaster area with heaps of corpses at the ends of alleys and the rubble of collapsed buildings spilling into the streets. This time it was clean. All of the trash had been completely cleaned away, in far too short a time for the citizens to have done it alone.

The World of Garwyth

The last known location of the Banestaff was King Ambric's palace in Brescau. Garwyth is a wealthy world with profitable diamond and ruby mines that have allowed its rulers to buy the best for their families and favourites. Even so, the proudest of cities still have poor citizens huddled together in slum housing. Those who own the mines grow richer day by day, while those who work in them can never hope to own them.

Garwyth is also a world without deities. The temples here are dedicated to philosophies rather than beings. Garwyth has developed the concept of a 'sacred academy', a combination library and cathedral where people come to study, read and become enlightened. The people listen to scholars instead of prophets. Clerics do exist but act as wise commentators upon the world instead of agents of the divine.

Religion that involves the worship of deities is forbidden outright; visitors from other planes are not permitted to practice the rites of their faiths while on Garwyth. They may wear symbols or regalia in private or under their clothing but may not do so openly. The punishment for an outsider caught worshipping gods is exile. The punishment for a native guilty of the same crime is death.

Player Characters in Garwyth: Player Character clerics who worship deities are left alone so long as they do not cast any spell that requires a divine focus, since this requires them to produce a religious symbol. Whether the locals turn them in or not depends on how grateful they are for the spellcasting. In general, deists are hated and feared so much that a local may promise not to turn a Player Character over to the authorities and then do so anyway, just to be safe.

Player Character wizards are treated with great respect so long as they act in a manner worthy of it. They are not charged for meals and are welcome guests at nobles' houses. A wizard who does not observe the proper etiquette is sneered at as a mere charlatan, the equivalent of a farm boy trying to play at being a gentleman. A Knowledge (the planes) or Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check (DC 40) is needed to ascertain what the proper etiquette is in any given situation.

Sorcerers are automatically treated as 'wannabe' wizards and snubbed accordingly.

Information: Recent History

When the planequake hit and the streets were filled with angels and demons, much like on every other plane, Garwyth went into turmoil. They had thought they were done with spiritual powers meddling with their lives. Some proclaimed that the gods had returned and were destroying Garwyth for its sins; others, thinking more practically, assumed that the absence of deist clerics had simply made it easier for demons to break into the plane.

King Ambric, seeing agents of supernatural evil running amok in his city, assumed they were after the Banestaff that lay in his palace vaults and panicked. Demons who got hold of the Banestaff could potentially destroy the entire world of Garwyth. It was time to deal with its menace once and for all.

According to a former court wizard, the Banestaff could only be destroyed if it was immersed in the fiery body of Scaldri the Unrepentant, a being of terrible flames said to be imprisoned under the desert city of Loshim awaiting the end of the world, when his jailer shall release him to consume the cities of men with fire.

King Ambric did not like the sound of this prophecy one bit. Leaving aside the question of whether there ever would be an end of the world for which the gods would return, it seemed like an awful lot of *work* to expect anyone to go to.

That was when the Sklavadok, the waste-disposal specialists of the planes, appeared within the palace and made King Ambric an offer. For a fee, they would not only deal with the rubbish and rubble piled up in the streets of Carolus Magna after the planequake, but they would also take the Banestaff away to where it would not be a problem for anyone ever again. King Ambric was delighted. His loyal counsellor and champion, Thomas of Birchdale, was not. He insisted that the Banestaff should be destroyed. King Ambric waved his protests aside. The Sklavadok had a cast-iron reputation. Everything would be all right.

Now the Sklavadok representatives have permanent rooms in the palace while their harvesters scoop up the waste in the streets. The Banestaff has been taken away and stored in a temporal enclosure cyst back in the Trashgardens (see page 153). The Player Characters must find out whether it is still there or whether some dark force is using it to destroy the worlds. Perhaps these mysterious Sklavadok *are* the enemy.

Location: The City of Brescau

This city clearly suffered heavily during the planequake but its citizens have thrown themselves into its restoration. Strangely, whole lots where buildings must once have stood are empty, with only the cellars and foundations left, open to the air. The streets are clean and the people have a healthy, suntanned look to them.

The Player Characters can blend in without difficulty, as the Common tongue is spoken here and the manner of dress is fairly cosmopolitan. Lodgings can be had at the Five Pillars Tavern if one likes philosophical debate over wine, at the Golden Crest if one prefers luxury, or at the Mason's Seal if beer and tavern fare is the order of the day.

City Layout: The city is divided into seven segments arranged around a central hub. This hub is a grand public square, floored by a mosaic depicting Reason as the key to understanding reality (a mighty figure of Reason is shown trampling the many-headed giant Chaos underfoot) and with a fifteen-foot-high bronze statue of Reason Triumphant at the centre. The statue is currently headless after an incident with a balor during the planequake.

Each segment of the city is named for one of the cardinal virtues of Garwyth, which are vital in a civilisation whose morals are derived from philosophy rather than theism. These virtues are Generosity, Silence, Politeness, Humility, Loyalty, Honesty and Hope.

The character of each district tends to reflect the virtue after which it is named. The soup kitchens for the poor (and the lowest standard of housing) are found in Generosity district, as are the pleasure-gardens that the King has given over for public use. Silence district is where the philosopher-priests live, meditating on their lessons in peace, while Politeness has the housing of the nobility, who practice etiquette with the fervour of a martial art. Archmage Constantine and his wizards also dwell here; it is a custom of Brescau that wizards are accorded the highest respect and are expected to be exemplary in their observation of proper social conduct.

Humility district, ironically, is where the palace and other governmental buildings are found, as those who most need to understand humility are those who are set above others, while Loyalty has the army barracks, central watch house and training academy, for obvious reasons. Honesty is the merchants' quarter, as all fair dealing must be founded on the principle of honesty between buyer and seller. Finally, Hope is on the easternmost section, where the sun can be seen rising each day. This is where the hospices and temples of healing are sited.

Brescau Statistics

Size: Metropolis
Population: 35,000
Racial Mix: 89% human, 7% aasimar, 3% tiefling, 1% other races
GP Limit: 40,000
Power Centre 1: King Ambric and his court
Power Centre 2: Archmage Constantine and the Watchers of the Skies
Executive Authority: Thomas of Birchdale and the city guardsmen

Information: Rumours in Brescau

The Player Characters can pick up the following information with a Gather Information check. The higher the check result, the more exclusive the information. Asking about the Banestaff brings only blank looks or sidelong glances and mutters of 'There's some things we don't talk about'.

10-25: The diviners have predicted that there is a new planequake coming. There is a rumour going around that one of the wizards in the Politeness district freed a demon from a powerful binding spell and in gratitude the demon told him that he should not stay in Brescau this week because bad things are going to happen. Thomas of Birchdale is angry about something, though nobody seems to know what; some believe that he intends to resign as the King's champion. The King has made a deal with some magicians to keep the city clean; their pets go around before dawn tidying up.

26-35: Some of the poorest people in the city have mysteriously gone missing, including a drunk called Old Norman. A man called Gurbit says he saw one of the magicians' pets swallow Old Norman up, quick as a flash, while the tramp snoozed in a pile of old rags. Some think that the magicians are performing human sacrifice. Worse, they might be worshipping *gods*. Nobody has ever seen them, so how can anyone know?

35+: The palace attendants say there is a horrible smell in the cellars; nobody wants to go down there anymore as the stench is so bad. There are some guests staying in the palace whom nobody gets to meet; they dress in grubby clothes and act like high gentry. Only the King ever speaks to them. There is a rumour that he is giving them hundreds of thousands of gold pieces from the Treasury.

Non-Player Character Group: The Harvesters

At night, a force of Sklavadok harvesters (see Appendix: New Monsters) moves through the city, scooping up the waste and consuming it. It is actually transported to the Trashgardens rather than eaten, but to an observer the harvester seems to be shovelling the rubbish into its mouth. The harvesters do this by night to avoid alarming the populace or getting in their way.

If the Player Characters are staying at an inn, a good way to introduce the harvesters is to have a Player Character awakened by the sound of something huge moving around outside the building. This is a harvester which has come to collect the tavern trash. If the Player Character thinks it is some sort of devouring monster that is coming for him, then so much the better…

If the Player Characters attack a harvester, it defends itself and may even swallow one or two of them (a good way to split up the party). It also calls for help from the Tallymen up at the palace (see below), who arrive (along with Blistergeist) within ten rounds.

Destroying a harvester annoys the Tallymen intensely. They present the Player Characters with a bill for the damage (1,650,000 gold pieces) and require a cash settlement on the spot or confiscation of items to the value.

Player Characters who are swallowed while attacking a harvester and sent to the Trashgardens are escorted off that plane for an additional fee of 50,000 gold pieces. Note that this only applies to those who attacked the creature. Any character who was swallowed accidentally, or can make a convincing case that they were so swallowed, is helped home for free.

Location: The Palace of King Ambric

This is a sprawling structure with onion-shaped tower tops and a central dome. The palace front features conspicuously large alcoves, which used to hold images of the deities of Garwyth and now contain statues of previous monarchs.

Behind the palace is a stretch of well-kept parkland, comprising a wood, several fields where ibex graze and a hill with a gazebo on top, where the King goes to be alone or to consult with his advisors. The wood is the home to the Sevikim (see below).

The Palace Cellars: The cellars are in two unconnected sections. The western part is used for storage and is a low-ceilinged set of rooms much like the cellar of any mundane building. The eastern section, also known as the catacombs, is much grander, with worked stone corridors and a high arched ceiling. It is the resting place of previous monarchs. The entrance to the catacombs is locked and guarded, while the entrance to the utility cellars is much easier to reach and use, as the servants use it all the time. Unknown to anyone in the palace save the archmage Constantine (and now Blistergeist), there is a tunnel connecting the western section to the eastern section, closed by a permanent *illusory wall*. Constantine created it himself.

Beneath the catacombs are the Vaults of Barrowgild (the name of the palace's original occupant and ruler). This is where a portion of the King's personal wealth is kept, the rest being banked with the mercanes. It is also the place where the Banestaff was kept until very recently.

As the catacombs are very rarely visited, Blistergeist the Sklavadok anchorite has made them his base of operations. He uses the tunnel to sneak between the two areas after dark, when the servants are in bed.

Non-Player Character Group: The Palace Guard

The palace guard, known as the Sevikim, are aasimars, and a step above the usual city watchmen. These descend from a single bloodline that has served the King for the last eleven generations. They were originally slaves bought as disposable warriors but their bravery in combat so impressed the reigning monarch that he granted them their liberty. To everyone's surprise, they opted to stay and honour what they now saw as their duty.

Their purview is to defend the palace against hostiles and protect the person of the King from attacks. Their authority only extends as far as the palace; they play no role in patrolling the city. Their loyalty is absolute. They

have no power to expel the Sklavadok, who are here by permission of the King.

Sevikim can be recognised by their silver-white hair, which they wear in Mohawk crests, and their stark white skin. When not on duty and wearing armour, they wear nothing other than a simple kilt-like garment. Culturally the Sevikim are barbarians by the standards of Garwyth, but as some like to put it, 'They are *our* barbarians.' They defend the King as if he were their tribal leader, not out of any great respect for law.

The Sevikim patrol the palace in groups of two to four.

The Sevikim Wood: When they are not on guard duty, the Sevikim live in leather tents in a region of enclosed parkland behind the palace where they have hunting rights. This patch of ground is considered sovereign Sevikim territory and none may enter it without their permission save the King and his family. Player Characters who trespass here may be killed on sight. However, those who are here by invitation are given hearty hospitality. Sevikim on duty are stern and silent but off duty they are as noisy and ebullient as any other barbarians.

Typical Sevikim Guardsman, Aasimar Bbn22: CR 23; Medium outsider; HD 22d12+44; hp 187; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 25, touch 12, flat-footed 23; Base Atk +21; Grp +25; Atk +28 melee (1d12+8/x3, *+2 adamantine greataxe*) or +25 ranged (1d6+6/x3, *+2 composite shortbow* (+2 Str bonus)) or +26/+26/+26 ranged (1d8+6/x3, *+2 triple-throw spear*); Full Atk +28/+23/+18/+13 melee (1d12+8/x3, *+2 adamantine greataxe*) or +25/+20/+15/+10 ranged (1d6+6/x3, *+2 composite shortbow* (+2 Str bonus)) or +26/+26/+26 ranged (1d8+6/x3, *+2 triple-throw spear*); SA *daylight*, tireless mighty rage 6/day; SQ damage reduction 5/—, darkvision 60 ft., improved uncanny dodge, indomitable will, resistance to acid 5, cold 5 and electrical damage 5, trap sense +6; AL NG; SV Fort +15, Ref +9, Will +8; Str 19, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Climb +19, Handle Animal +10, Intimidate +25, Jump +19, Listen +28, Ride +12, Spot +3, Survival +21, Swim +9; Cleave, Dodge, Great Cleave, Mobility, Power Attack, Terrifying Rage, Weapon Focus (greataxe), Weapon Focus (spear).

Daylight (Sp): A Sevikim guardsman can use *daylight* once per day as a 22nd level caster.

Rage (Ex): When raging, a Sevikim guardsman temporarily gains a +8 bonus to Strength, a +8 bonus to Constitution and a +4 morale bonus on Will saves but he takes a -2 penalty to Armour Class. The increase in Constitution increases his hit points by four points per level but these hit points go away at the end of the rage when his Constitution score drops back to normal. In addition, while the Sevikim guardsman is raging, any enemy who views him must make a Will save opposed by the guardsman's Intimidate skill check or become panicked (if it has less than 22 HD) or shaken (if it has from 23 to 44 HD) for 4d6 rounds. An enemy with more than 44 Hit Dice is not affected by the terrifying rage.

Equipment & Treasure: +2 adamantine greataxe, +2 breastplate, +2 composite shortbow, +2 triple-throw spear, arrows (20)*, amulet of epic natural armour +6.*

Event: Reception at the Palace

This event can come about in two ways. If the Player Characters do not make a secret of their participation in the Assembly at the Skull, word is quickly passed back to the King, who is keen to have an audience with these people. He dispatches a group of guardsmen to invite the Player Characters, politely but firmly, to a banquet in their honour.

The other route is for the Player Characters to present themselves at the palace. The King agrees to receive them and gives an immediate order for a banquet to be prepared. While this is happening, his court wizard briefs him. Archmage Constantine has heard of the Assembly's formation but does not have the time to participate. He is far more concerned with what has befallen the Banestaff, which he was hoping to purloin for himself at some stage in the future.

If the Player Characters take a stealthier route, such as sneaking into the palace to investigate, this event does not take place.

The Banquet: Present at the banquet are King Ambric, Thomas of Birchdale, Archmage Constantine and a bevy of 20 nobles who count themselves privileged to be here.

Ambric insists that the Player Characters tell him all of the current theories concerning the planequake. His concern for his realm is evident. Thomas of Birchdale is polite but has a sour expression through most of the meal, while Archmage Constantine looks keenly interested.

If the Player Characters ask about the Banestaff or imply that it might be involved in the planar destruction, there is a pregnant pause. Talking about the Banestaff is a terrible social gaffe. The king coldly answers that it would be 'impossible' for the Banestaff to be involved. With that, Thomas of Birchdale storms out of the room and any *bonhomie* the banquet might have had is dissipated. The Player Characters are escorted out of the palace soon

afterward. Archmage Constantine makes a point of finding them and talking to them, explaining that it is terribly bad manners to mention the you-know-what, but also that he understands their concern and is willing to help them along.

Staying at the Palace: If the Player Characters have made good impressions on King Ambric, he invites them to stay. The Sevikim are given instructions to allow the Player Characters the run of the place, though they may not enter the private apartments or the vaults.

Non-Player Character: King Ambric

Ambric is a monarch in his sixties. He wears a long wig of silver curls to cover up a nearly bald straggle-haired head. His eyes are tired and he has an expression of affable weakness, as if he would do anything for a quiet life. He acts as if he is intensely proud of his kingdom and intolerant of those who do not have the proper respect for protocol. This is, however, a false front. He is sick of the weight of his office and wishes he could pass it on to someone else. A Sense Motive check (DC 30) notices this well-covered trait.

Once the Player Characters find out what has befallen the Banestaff, they may be able to persuade King Ambric to allow it out of the cyst. He only agrees to this if the Player Characters promise to destroy it completely.

Non-Player Character: Archmage Constantine

Constantine is a wizard of high fashion, the unquestioned leader of his social set. In a realm where wizards are considered the most upper-class citizens of all, he has an enviable position. He has a small elite club of students, the Watchers of the Skies. Depending on whom you ask, this is either because they have high towers that allow them to study the heavens or because they constantly have their noses in the air.

In Ambric's court, Constantine is charged with the duty of counselling the King on matters of magic. He argued strongly against letting the Sklavadok look after the Banestaff. He and Thomas hate each other venomously, yet in this they were of one voice; hence neither can understand why the King ignored them both and engaged the Sklavadok's services.

Constantine is arrogant, vain and completely obsessed with himself. He sports a trimmed goatee, a pair of boots with ridiculously long pointed toes (because they are the current fad) and a plum waistcoat. He is affable and patronising towards the Player Characters. He is keen to find out if he can manipulate them in any way and, if so, what he can gain from it.

Constantine is filled with a lust for power. His lofty position has not assuaged this at all. He had made careful plans to steal the Banestaff from its vault, which were thwarted at the last minute by the arrival of the Sklavadok, whom he now despises. He had got as far as creating a secret tunnel from the kitchen cellars to the catacombs, blocked off with an *illusory wall* at both ends. If the new arrivals, the Player Characters, are setting out to track the Banestaff down and recover it, perhaps he can work the situation to his advantage.

Constantine tries to ingratiate himself with the Player Characters, offering to help them find out what has become of the Banestaff and explaining the need to destroy it properly. He does not want to be seen to go behind King Ambric's back, so he treads very carefully, making carefully phrased suggestions along the lines of 'Perhaps we should find out where these oddly dressed visitors come from' and 'I am sure the King would not object if you explored an empty vault.' He wants them to do the hard work and take the blame if there is any, while he reaps the reward.

If the Player Characters ask how the Banestaff can be destroyed, he tells them of Scaldri the Unrepentant (see below).

Archmage Constantine, Male Human Wiz21/Acm5: CR 26; Medium humanoid; HD 21d4+21 plus 5d4+5; hp 91; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +13; Grp +12; Atk +12 melee (1d6-1, *staff of mighty force*); Full Atk +12/+7 melee (1d6-1, *staff of mighty force*); SA arcane fire, arcane reach, spells; SQ mastery of counterspelling, mastery of elements, mastery of shaping; AL NE; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +17; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 20, Wis 14, Cha 11.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +33, Decipher Script +34, Knowledge (arcana) +34, Knowledge (history) +34, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +34, Knowledge (the planes) +34, Profession (courtier) +31, Spellcraft +37; Enlarge Spell[B], Extend Spell[B], Great Fortitude, Greater Spell Focus (Illusion), Heighten Spell[B], Improved Counterspell, Improved Spell Capacity, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Multispell, Quicken Spell[B], Scribe Scroll[B], Skill Focus (Concentration), Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Focus (Illusion).

Arcane Fire (Su): Constantine has the ability to change arcane spell energy into arcane fire, manifesting it as a bolt of raw magical energy. The bolt is a ranged touch attack with long range (600 feet) that deals 5d6 points of damage plus 1d6 points of damage per level of the spell used to create the effect.

Arcane Reach (Su): Constantine can use spells with a range of 'touch' on a target up to 30 feet away. He must make a ranged touch attack.

Mastery of Counterspelling: When Constantine counterspells a spell, it is turned back upon the caster as if fully affected by a *spell turning* spell. If the spell cannot be affected by *spell turning*, it is merely counterspelled.

Mastery of Elements: Constantine can alter an arcane spell when cast so that it utilises a different element from the one it normally uses. This ability can only alter a spell with the acid, cold, fire, electrical or sonic descriptor. The spell's casting time is unaffected. Constantine decides whether to alter the spell's energy type and chooses the new energy type when he begins casting.

Mastery of Shaping: Constantine can alter area and effect spells that use one of the following shapes: burst, cone, cylinder, emanation or spread. The alteration consists of creating spaces within the spell's area of effect that are not subject to the spell. The minimum dimension for these spaces is a 5-foot cube. Furthermore, any spells capable of being shaped have minimum dimensions of 5 feet instead of 10 feet.

Spells prepared (4/6/5/5/5/5/4/4/4/4/1, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, prestidigitation, read magic, resistance;* 1st – *animate rope, colour spray, identify, mage armour, magic missile, ventriloquism;* 2nd – *hypnotic pattern, minor image, mirror image, scorching ray, touch of idiocy;* 3rd – *displacement, fireball, major image, slow, vampiric touch;* 4th – *fear, greater invisibility, hallucinatory terrain, illusory wall, scrying;* 5th – *cone of cold, magic jar, mage's private sanctum, persistent image, telekinesis;* 6th – *greater dispel magic, mislead, vampiric touch* (maximised) *(2);* 7th – *forcecage, project image, sequester, statue;* 8th – *maze, mind blank, scintillating pattern, telekinetic sphere;* 9th – *disintegrate* (maximised), *prismatic sphere, shapechange;* 10th – *chain lightning* (quickened), *meteor swarm*.

Equipment & Treasure: +10 bracers of armour, staff of mighty force.

Constantine chooses his battles with extreme care. If he must enter combat, he makes sure he is not alone, and has a handful of wizard colleagues (20th level wizards), a group of palace guards or a band of city watchmen with him.

Non-Player Character: Thomas of Birchdale

Thomas is a paladin, the King's Champion, meaning that he must fight duels where the King's honour is at stake. This is more of a symbolic role these days, as no duels are called anymore, but Thomas is still expected to serve as the King's most reliable counsellor. For the last five years he has been urging the King to advertise for heroes who could take the Banestaff to its final destruction. He is furious that his advice has been ignored.

He wants the Sklavadok out of the palace but does not know how to go about it. Violence is no solution, nor can he persuade the King to renege on his contract with them. If the Player Characters have any suggestions and he can act on them without betraying his office, he will do so.

Description: Thomas is a red-haired giant of a man, rather like a dwarf reshaped to human proportions. He has a gravelly voice and narrow evil-looking eyes which can be terrifying until he smiles, which gives away his kindly inner nature.

Non-Player Character Group: The Tallymen

The Tallymen currently staying at the palace are named Quentin, Carstairs and Norbert (see page 236 for more information and statistics for Sklavadok tallymen). They are all of exceptionally high rank among their people, as can be seen from the withered purple chrysanthemums they wear on their lapels. Their patron, the anchorite Blistergeist, is hiding in the castle catacombs, as his stench

makes him far too noticeable. Sometimes he ventures out of the palace to watch the harvesters make their rounds.

If the Sklavadok discover that the Player Characters are sniffing around, they give them a polite but firm warning to back off or they will get hurt. There is no second warning. Should they encounter Player Character meddling after this, they ambush them, with Blistergeist (see page 236 for more information and statistics on Sklavadok anchorites). Any dead Player Characters are taken back to the Trashgardens and buried under a mound of refuse two hundred feet high. This may create problems with *resurrection*.

The Sklavadok are not evil but they do operate by their own strict code and by the laws of business. As the Sklavadok see it, this affair simply has nothing to do with the Player Characters and they do not have the right to go poking around in what does not concern them, even if the universe is in mortal peril.

Quentin is unshaven, with a bent stovepipe hat and a monocle. Carstairs has an inch of beard and patchy hair, and drinks neat alcohol from a battered and filthy flask. Norbert has mutton-chop whiskers, the build of a plum pudding and skin colouration to match.

The Trashgardens

By one route or another, the Player Characters' search for the Banestaff eventually leads them to the Trashgardens, the home plane of the Sklavadok. Some may arrive here by the mouth of a harvester; others may discover the plane by *scrying* on the Tallymen as they *plane shift* back and forth between Garwyth and their home.

You have never smelled anything quite so foul as this in your lives. Even the stink of demons from the lowest hells cannot compare. This entire plane is a rubbish dump. Acre upon acre of refuse spreads out before you, simmering in a stew beneath a hot sun. The drone of billions of flies sings a delirious song in your ears.

The rubbish beneath your feet mixes familiar household refuse with items that come from unguessable planes. Blackened pots, pans and banana peels lie next to the severed web-fingered arm of a creature you do not recognise. Chewed bones and broken glass, soggy paper and potshards half-bury the bronze carcass of an alien war chariot. A jointed metal hand turned brown with rust protrudes from a sea of trash, as if an iron golem of colossal size were drowning in it.

As you adjust to your new surroundings, you see odd points of light moving slowly across the landscape, hovering thirty feet up. These vomit out periodic gouts of trash that fall in a rattling rain. This must be how the rubbish is getting here.

You are not alone here. There is a group of people picking their way across the garbage hills. The sound of merry whistling reaches you.

This is a group of Sklavadok Tallymen browsing through the latest arrivals. The points of light are, of course, the other ends of the *gates* set into the harvesters.

The Monsters of the Dump: The Sklavadok do not take kindly to trespassers. As soon as they locate any, they call for a garbage colossus (see Appendix: New Monsters) to deal with them in a permanent and messy fashion:

Something is happening. There is a sound like shingles on a beach, as the trash ahead and to the left begins to rise up, pushed from below by some huge object. To the right, the same thing happens. Two rising mounds of shaking garbage grow larger as you watch. They tear free and you see all at once that they are hands, attached to arms, attached to a body. It sits up, a titanic man-shape made entirely from junk, with a barrel for a nose, a wrecked ship's hull for a right shoulder and a ragged gash of a mouth.

The colossus tries to pound the Player Characters to pulp. The Sklavadok watch from a safe distance and cheer it on.

Local Geography

Wading around in an endless field of garbage will not get the Player Characters very far. They need to find some sort of bearings. Scouting out the immediate area reveals nothing but trash and rats, but there are three towering grey shapes on the horizon that may be some sort of city or fortification.

The Pylons: When viewed from up close, these prove to be pillars of rock half a mile across, with tunnels interlaced through them and hundreds of openings in the sides. They look like a strange cross between modern high-rise housing and natural rock formations.

The tunnels are full of Sklavadok citizens who live inside them quite comfortably, their homes furnished with items salvaged from the rubbish fields below. The rock columns tower so far above the trash level that it could keep falling for centuries without burying them. Groups travel out in the morning, spend the day picking over the rubbish to see what interesting bits and pieces they can find, then return home in the evening with sacks full of useful items.

The Sklavadok are hostile to intruders, especially here where they feel safest. All Diplomacy checks are made at

a –2 circumstance penalty. Other than spectacular success with Diplomacy, the only chance the Player Characters have of finding out anything about the fate of the Banestaff is to use guile and subterfuge.

Sklavadok Homes: A typical home cell is little more than a reeking hollow in the rock, furnished with salvaged bits of junk: tables made from half-barrels, chairs made from buckets, potion bottles recycled as candle holders, chess sets made from bent tin and beds made from old doors laid on their sides.

Learning Rumours: With a little careful investigation, the Player Characters find out that dangerous artefacts are usually given to the anchorites to deal with. These mysterious creatures then seal them away in their temporal cysts, located in the warrens deep down below the surface. Only the anchorites know how to get into those deep burrows. Whenever a Tallyman accidentally digs down into one, the entrance is quickly filled in.

Location: The Warrens of the Anchorites

The anchorite warrens are typically ten to fifteen feet across. They are nothing more than tunnels seared through the packed trash by means of *disintegrate* spells. The tunnels are kept from collapsing by props made from scavenged wood, bits of iron girders, broken lances and similar worryingly unstable items. Spells that deal damage to the surroundings, such as *fireball*, will cause a cave-in 75% of the time when inside an anchorite warren.

Anchorite Meditation Chambers: The anchorites use these rooms to rest and prepare spells. Servants wait on them, fetching spellbooks and scrolls for them to read from. These servants are identical to regular *unseen servants*, with the exception that they are dressed in pieces of ragged clothing (a hat here, a scarf there) and so can be mistaken for ghosts or dangerous invisible creatures. These rooms typically contain from zero to three anchorites.

Crafting Rooms: In these rooms, the anchorites take great pains to preserve single objects that appear to have no worth whatsoever. They lock up such items as an iron horseshoe, an ordinary dagger, a piece of flint or a pair of broken spectacles in padded adamantine boxes, as if to preserve them for the future.

Temporal Encystment: See the anchorite description in Appendix: New Monsters (page 237) for these. A room containing a *temporal encystment* is usually only five feet larger than the cyst itself.

The Banestaff

This magical implement is a crystal prism five feet in length and two inches thick, deep red and black in colour as if filled with curdled blood. When the staff is tilted, the colours swirl around inside. It looks fragile, as if a hard blow would shatter it, but is as hard as steel.

The staff's purpose is simply to cause destruction. It wants structures smashed, buildings torn down and other items broken. It is not evil but is highly dangerous, because it loves ruin and prompts the wielder to cause more and more.

The artefact functions as a staff with unlimited charges. It has the following powers:

- The Banestaff functions as a *+10 anarchic adamantine quarterstaff.*
- The Banestaff's wielder may use *shatter* at will (caster level 30th).
- The wielder may use *disintegrate* at will, once every 1d4 rounds (caster level 30th level).
- The wielder may use *mage's disjunction* three times per day.
- The wielder may use *earthquake* once per day.
- The wielder may use the epic spell *ruin* once per day.
- When used to make a sunder attack, the Banestaff ignores hardness and deals an additional 2d6 damage.
- The wielder may attempt to shatter the underlying energy matrix of a given plane, causing the plane to fragment. To do this, he makes a caster level check (DC 50). If successful, the plane begins to collapse, with the region of disintegration spreading at a rate of ten miles per day. This damage can be repaired by the intervention of a deity, but by no other means.

The Banestaff has an *ad hoc* Ego score of 28. It is furiously jealous of other items, especially other artefacts, and uses its *disintegration* and *mage's disjunction* powers to destroy them if its wielder cannot keep it in check. The Games Master should require a control check whenever the wielder is in the presence of a large number of structures (as in a city), other magical items or anything else that the Banestaff can vandalise. When surrounded by debris, the Banestaff is happy and quiescent.

Event: Dealing with the Anchorites

If the Player Characters make a serious nuisance of themselves and cannot be removed quickly, the anchorites call for a parley. In their sign language, they demand to know why the Player Characters have invaded their domain. The Player Characters need magic or a Tallyman to translate for them.

The anchorites lead the Player Characters to the cyst that contains the Banestaff, though they refuse to open it. Only on King Ambric's word will they do that. If the King gives his permission, they hand the Banestaff over to the Player Characters and ask them to leave and never come back.

If the Player Characters do not remove the Banestaff from the cyst, within days Archmage Constantine makes his own journey here. He uses forged papers to persuade the anchorites to allow an inspection, then steals the Banestaff and vanishes into the night with it. The Games Master can then have him appear as a villain in later chapters, allowing the Player Characters the chance to retrieve the Banestaff and destroy it if they choose.

The City of Loshim

According to the legends of Garwyth, this was the city that the gods built when they dwelled on the earth for a while, populating it with the creatures they created. Little is left of it now but the scale of the ruins makes it easy to believe the legend. Stone blocks the size of manor houses and segments of pillar as wide across as an entire Ashfar temple lie lopsided in the sand, with the remnants of vast images faintly visible on them.

Time and light play tricks here. A Player Character who lets his gaze relax sometimes sees a hooded figure watching him who is gone the next moment, or sees a colossal building out of the corner of his eye, only to find empty space when he turns to look.

The Pillar and the Dome

There are two parts of the city that are still intact. One pillar towers high over the ruins, atop which perches Teshtukku (see below). Beneath, in the shadow of that pillar, is a dome of masonry on which is an elaborate warding symbol in the form of an eye within a stylised looping circle. A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 40) recognises this as an ancient binding rune, one only used in epic spellcasting. The dome is clearly a prison for some powerful entity.

The Gaoler

An abomination, the infernal known to men as Teshtukku, guards the prison. He watches the dead city from above, high on his lonely pillar. When any visitors approach the dome of Scaldri, he flies down to challenge them.

The crimson creature approaching is undoubtedly a fiend of some sort. It does not resemble any of the usual demons or devils of Hell. It is tall, with membranous bat-like wings and black sweeping horns like those of an ox. It bows gravely to you as it alights on a nearby rock slab. Its metallic hooves dash sparks from the stone. You see that it has an iron key hanging from its neck by a chain.

It speaks in a voice harsh from lack of use. 'According to covenant, I greet you in peace, travellers. I bear the name of Teshtukku as the first of my burdens. What business do your living souls have in this place of dust?'

Teshtukku's only duty is to keep Scaldri imprisoned. There are no gods left here anymore, but Teshtukku still does what he was charged to do, because he is lawful. He believes that if he does this until the Last Days, he will be freed and transformed into a pure being.

Event: Opening the Prison

The Player Characters have several moral dilemmas ahead of them. The Banestaff must be destroyed for the safety of the multiverse but only the fires of Scaldri can damage it; and if Scaldri is released, he will try to burn down the

Scaldri the Unrepentant

When the gods gave fire to mankind, the lesser elementals accepted this without umbrage. However, their act offended the more refined beings of fire, who resolved that they would never again be the friends of man. Such beings were the efreeti and similar evil fire creatures. They turned against the gods and established their own home on the Plane of Fire.

One terrible entity, a phaethon abomination named Scaldri, was the leader of this rebellion. He went further than the others and attempted to destroy all of the civilisations of mankind with fire. The gods chastised him and tried to persuade him to return to their service, but he was unrepentant and would not.

Incensed at his stubborn pride, the gods bound Scaldri in a great dome and entrusted his keeping to an infernal, Teshtukku. This infernal had previously rebelled along with Scaldri, but relented and accepted the authority of the gods. To repay him for his recantation, the gods promised Teshtukku that if he guarded the dome faithfully until the time when Scaldri was to be released to devour the earth (as part of the appointed apocalypse, not Scaldri's own wrath), he would be redeemed and cleansed of his fallen nature.

whole world of Garwyth. Furthermore, the only item that can unlock the stone prison is the key that Teshtukku holds, and he is not about to surrender it.

Teshtukku sincerely believes that he is doing the will of the gods by guarding the prison. The Player Characters can try to persuade him that the gods have left or been destroyed, but if Teshtukku really *is* convinced of this he flies into a berserk rage and tries to kill the Player Characters, as there is no longer any point to his existence.

The most straightforward approach is simply to fight Teshtukku, take the key and free Scaldri, throw the Banestaff into his path, stay just long enough to watch it burn and then flee the plane. Staying to fight Scaldri is heroic, but with a Challenge Rating of 34, he is far beyond the Player Characters' ability to deal with. They will have to recruit help, such as from the Sevikim at King Aubric's palace, the other members of the Assembly or even from Mortec Chau or Azrique Malfaisance, if they are to triumph against him.

Once the prison door is unlocked, it opens with a violent grinding sound and cannot be closed again. Fierce light shines from within, where the fiery mass of Scaldri still seethes with hate. As soon as he sees the door open, he surges for it, intent on resuming his destruction of the world.

Teshtukku the Jailer: CR 26; Large outsider (evil, lawful); HD 40d8+380; hp 700; Init +11; Spd 80 ft., fly 240 ft. (perfect); AC 50, touch 16, flat-footed 43; Base Atk +40; Grp +60; Atk +58 melee (4d6+16, claw); Full Atk +58 melee (4d6+16, 2 claws) and +52 melee (4d8+8 plus spell suck, bite) and +50 melee (2d6+8, 2 wings) and +50 melee (4d8+8, tail slam); Space/Reach 10ft./10 ft.; SA improved grab, learned spell immunity, spell suck, spell-like abilities, *summon fiend*; SQ abomination traits, damage reduction 35/—, fast healing 15, regeneration 15, spell resistance 38; AL LE; SV Fort +31, Ref +29, Will +30; Str 43, Dex 25, Con 28, Int 22, Wis 26, Cha 29.

Skills & Feats: Balance +50, Concentration +52, Diplomacy +52, Escape Artist +50, Hide +50, Jump +36, Knowledge (arcana) +49, Knowledge (the planes) +49, Listen +53, Move Silently +50, Search +49, Sense Motive +51, Spellcraft +49, Spot +53, Tumble +50; Alertness, Blinding Speed, Cleave, Epic Toughness, Epic Weapon Focus (bite), Epic Weapon Focus (claw), Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Sunder, Tenacious Magic (*greater invisibility*), Tenacious Magic (*blur*), Weapon Focus (claw).

Abomination Traits: Immune to *polymorphing*, petrification and other form-altering attacks; not subject to energy drain, ability drain, ability damage or death from massive damage; immune to mind-affecting effects; resistance to cold 20 and fire 20; nondetection; *true seeing* at will; blindsight 500 ft.; telepathy out to 1,000 ft.

Improved Grab (Ex): If Teshtukku hits with a claw, he deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. He can use this ability on Large and smaller creatures. Teshtukku has the option to conduct the grapple normally or to simply use his claw to hold the opponent. Each successful grapple check he makes during successive rounds automatically deals standard claw damage in addition to automatic spell suck damage.

Learned Spell Immunity (Su): If Teshtukku is affected by a spell cast by a particular spellcaster, he thereafter becomes immune to that spell when cast by that spellcaster.

Regeneration (Ex): Teshtukku takes normal damage from good and from chaotic weapons.

Spell Suck (Su): If Teshtukku bites a foe, the foe loses one of its highest-level prepared spells or one of its unused daily spell slots. The victim chooses which prepared spell to lose. If the victim has no prepared spells or unused spell slots (either because it has exhausted its spellcasting for the day or because the victim is not a spellcaster), the bite instead deals two points of temporary Intelligence damage.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *animate dead*, *blasphemy* (DC 26), *blur*, *charm person* (DC 20), *create undead*, *darkness*, *deeper darkness*, *desecrate*, *detect chaos*, *detect good*, *detect law*, *detect magic*, *fear* (DC 23), *fireball* (DC 22), *greater dispel magic*, *greater invisibility* (DC 23), *greater teleport* (self plus 1,000 pounds), *hold person* (DC 22), *magic circle against good*, *major image* (DC 22), *polymorph*, *produce flame* (DC 21), *pyrotechnics* (DC 21), *read magic*, *scrying* (DC 23), *suggestion* (DC 22), *symbol of death* (DC 27), *telekinesis* (DC 24), *unhallow* (DC 24), *unholy aura* (DC 27), *unholy blight* (DC 23), *wall of fire;* 1/day – *fire storm* (DC 27), *hellball* (DC 29) (epic spell), *implosion* (DC 28), *meteor swarm* (DC 28). Caster level is 26th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Fiend (Sp): Four times per day, Teshtukku can summon a pit fiend. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th level spell.

Equipment & Treasure: Prison key.

Scaldri the Unrepentant: CR 34; Gargantuan outsider (evil, extraplanar, fire); HD 62d8+806; 1,362 hp; Init +15; Spd 120 ft., burrow 120 ft.; AC 47, touch 13, flat-footed 40; Base Atk +62; Grp +98; Atk +85 melee (4d8+24 plus 2d6 fire, pseudopod slam); Full Atk +85 melee (4d8+24 plus 2d6 fire, 8 pseudopod slams); Space/Reach 20 ft./10 ft; SA damage reduction 15/epic lawful and epic, fiery overrun, fiery touch, improved grab, spell-like abilities, swallow whole, *summon elder fire elemental*; SQ abomination traits, fast healing 25, immunity to fire, ooze-like immunities, regeneration 25, spell resistance 46, vulnerability to cold; AL CE; SV Fort +48, Ref +42, Will +43; Str 58, Dex 25, Con 36, Int 8, Wis 18, Cha 39.

Skills & Feats: Climb +89, Craft (metalworking) +29, Craft (stone working) +29, Hide +12, Jump +69, Knowledge (geography) +64, Listen +71, Move Silently +72, Search +64, Spot +71; Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam).

Epic Feats: Blinding Speed (x5), Epic Toughness (x3), Epic Weapon Focus (slam), Epic Will, Superior Initiative.

Note: Scaldri's natural weapons are treated as epic and evil for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Abomination Traits: Immune to *polymorphing*, petrification and other form-altering attacks; not subject to energy drain, ability drain, ability damage or death from massive damage; immune to mind-affecting effects; resistance to cold 20; resistance to fire 20; nondetection; *true seeing* at will; blindsight 500 ft.; telepathy out to 1,000 ft.

Fiery Overrun (Ex): A foe who is successfully overrun by Scaldri is treated as if swallowed whole.

Fiery Touch (Ex): Touching or being touched by Scaldri deals 2d6 points of fire damage.

Improved Grab (Ex): If Scaldri hits with a pseudopod, he deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. Scaldri can use improved grab on a Huge or smaller creature. He has the option to conduct the grapple normally, simply maintaining a pseudopod hold, or to attempt to absorb his opponent by swallowing him whole. Each successful grapple check he makes during successive rounds automatically deals the damage listed for the pseudopod.

Ooze-like Immunities (Ex): Immune to poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, *polymorphing* and mind-influencing effects; not subject to critical hits or flanking; blind.

Regeneration (Ex): Scaldri takes normal damage from lawful weapons and cold-forged weapons, and double damage from cold or ice weapons.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *delayed blast fireball* (DC 31), *fireball* (DC 27), *fire storm* (DC 32), *flame strike* (DC 29), *wall of fire;* 1/day: *scrying* (DC 28). Caster level is 34th and the save DCs are Charisma-based..

Summon Elder Fire Elemental (Sp): Up to ten times per day, Scaldri can summon an elder fire elemental.

Swallow Whole (Ex): Scaldri can absorb opponents he holds with a second successful grapple check after a grab. The opponent must be Huge or smaller. Absorbed creatures are dealt 20d6 points of fire damage and 10d6 points of bludgeoning damage each round they remain inside Scaldri. A victim must make a successful grapple check to 'swim' free from the living magma of his body.

Aftermath

If the Player Characters are able to destroy the Banestaff and not take the world of Garwyth with it, they earn the gratitude of Ambric and his court (and the fierce resentment of Archmage Constantine). The King promises to have nothing more to do with the Sklavadok and to report to the Player Characters if his agents hear anything that might be relevant to their quest.

Although destroying the Banestaff rids the multiverse of a potential menace, it does not bring the Player Characters any closer to finding out who is behind the destruction of the planes. With another artefact found *not* to be responsible for the devastation, there cannot be many avenues of investigation left.

Seeds of Destruction, Part III – The Eye

Summary: The last of the artefact quests is a hunt for the last surviving fragment of a titanic being of chaos who was shattered by the combined efforts of several pantheons of deities.

The Legend of the Eye of Igrath

It is not known whether Igrath was created within this multiverse or was accidentally summoned here from some wholly alternate space of ultimate chaos; most historians believe that he was brought into existence through a temporal rift from the time before there was an ordered creation. It is said that in the time before the planes were established, whole dynasties of terrible beings arose and warred against one another with no purpose but blind ravening hunger and the will to destroy. They were the children of the Dark, and in darkness they lived, fought and died. In the volumes of planar lore, they are called the Tenebrae.

The last of these primal protodeities was destroyed aeons before the Astral Plane condensed out into the Material, Ethereal and other planes. Sages only know of them by the traces they left. Echoes of their voices still linger in far and lonely planes and images of their wars can be seen trapped in the halos around the stars.

Nobody knows what the Tenebrae looked like, but it is a popular theory that the Uvuudaum and the protonatural creatures (especially the former) are their closest analogues. These twisted life forms are thought by some to be the descendants of the Tenebrae or the results of lingering pools of their dark magic.

The oldest of the Tenebrae was Igrath. Unlike the others, he was partly immortal. His eye, covered by a leathery globe of skin, is all that remains of him. It is rumoured to drift through Serabbanin, a plane of chaos, guarded by a devoted band of creatures in anticipation of the day when it will open. Fear of these creatures (and of the chaos storms that drift through Serabbanin) dissuades artefact hunters from trying to plunder the Eye of Igrath.

The Eye has no known function other than to cause indiscriminate destruction. When Igrath's eye opens, so the sages say, the chaos from before the dawn of time shall return and all things shall be drawn into it. This sounds very much like the destruction that is already taking place.

Where to Start

The Player Characters' only sources of information about the Eye of Igrath are the Legion of the Realm Imponderable. Nobody else seems to have heard of it; coupled with the general mistrust of the Legion, this leads some to think that the Eye may not exist. Bodiless Ao in particular scoffs at the idea that there might be a destructive artefact of which *he* has not heard.

Consulting the Legion: The Player Characters can visit the Legion at any time. The Legion spend their days sitting cross-legged in a circle within their bone dwelling, not speaking to anyone. If they are conversing, it is evidently through telepathy. Upon sight of a Player Character, they stand and make the group welcome. They can tell the Player Characters the above legend.

Having done so, they look at one another and then at the Player Characters before announcing: 'If the Eye of Igrath is gone, then we can prepare for the worst. If it is still within Serabbanin, you must bring it to us. We know how it may be… dealt with.'

Bids for the Eye: If word reaches the other factions that the Player Characters are seeking for the Eye, interest is piqued. Other factions approach them and make their own bids. Jasmeera offers to trade one million gold pieces for the Eye, while on the other end of the scale, the Aerial Demons of Hecke offer to 'beat up anyone you want beaten up'. The planespiders offer nothing, instead insisting that they alone can be trusted to deal with this relic of an unknown beast of chaos, so the Player Characters have a moral obligation to hand it over to them.

The Plane of Serabbanin

This plane is an assault on the senses, especially the eyes. The sound of the place is that of something continuously breaking apart and falling down, as if the listeners were imprisoned in a castle made of loose bricks being demolished around them.

The sky is a prismatic blitz of shifting colour, like a *hypnotic pattern* but without being captivating. Creatures who look directly at the sky must make Reflex saves (DC 20) or be blinded for as long as they are exposed to it. Creatures who make their saves are dazzled.

The Islands: Floating in the sky are islands of stone, which swoop and fly crazily like croutons in stirred soup. The speed at which they move is dizzying. Strangely, they only seem to move in the horizontal plane, never flying off at angles closer

to the vertical. These islands continually collide with one another and fly off at new tangents, which is what creates the sound of smashing and crumbling. The larger masses of stone invariably survive the impact, while the smaller ones explode into debris. This flotsam swirls away in the eddies of chaos, condensing into clumps which in time form into new islands, beginning the process all over again.

Some of the larger islands have extensive plant growth on their inner regions, away from the impacts of the smaller clusters. These plants (known as *scira trees*) look like baobabs the size of giant redwoods and bear odd leathery fruits that glow like lanterns.

The Heartstorm: In the far distance at the centre of the plane, a churning maelstrom like a dark galaxy can be seen. This seems to be the hub of the whirling tides that smash the islands against one another. It appears to be about six hundred miles away.

Planar Traits

Serabbanin has the following traits:

- Light gravity. Characters take a –2 circumstance penalty on attack rolls and Balance, Ride, Swim and Tumble checks. All items weigh half as much. Weapon ranges double and characters gain a +2 circumstance bonus on Climb and Jump checks. Falling characters are dealt 1d4 points of damage for each ten feet of the fall (maximum 20d4).

- Strongly chaotic-aligned. A –2 circumstance penalty applies on all Charisma-based, Intelligence-based and Wisdom-based checks made by all creatures not of chaotic alignment.

- Wild magic. Any spell or spell-like ability used within Serabbanin has a chance to go awry. The caster must make a level check (DC 15 + the level of the spell or effect) for the magic to function normally. For mishaps, see the *DMG*.

Collisions: Characters struck by flying islands are dealt 20d6 points of bludgeoning damage, with a Reflex save (DC 35) allowed for half damage. If they are unlucky enough to be slammed between two islands that collide, they take double damage. A character who is standing within 50 feet of an island's edge when it is struck by another island must make a Strength check (DC 20) or be knocked prone. Characters who are especially stable (such as dwarves and quadrupeds) gain a +4 bonus to this check.

Travel Between Islands: The easiest way to move from one island to another is by flying. Especially reckless characters can take advantage of the plane's low gravity to leap long distances, hurling themselves from one island to another. A character who is willing to stand and wait for a while can escape from any island by jumping onto the first available island to come by.

Island Fragmentation: Sometimes the larger islands crack in two because of internal stresses and cumulative damage; the Games Master may find this a good way to split the party if the Player Characters have already moved apart from one another. When an island breaks apart, any creature within ten feet of the crevasse must make a Reflex save (DC 30) or fall in. The crevasse widens at a speed of 60 feet per round.

The First Island

If the Player Characters use some form of magic to gain better control of their arrival, such as opening a *gate* and watching what the landscape is like before stepping through, they can go straight to a large land mass.

If, however, the Player Characters arrive by *plane shift* or similar means, they arrive in midair. Islands rush past above and below them at speeds seem likely to mash any creatures they hit to jelly. Unless the Player Characters do something to arrest their descent, they fall straight down into the path of an oncoming island. On the bright side, they do not seem to be falling as fast as they would on the Material Plane. They have two rounds to react. After that the island slams into them and deals points of 20d6 bludgeoning damage, with a Reflex save (DC 35) allowed for half damage.

On the Island: The outer region of the island is bare, windswept rock. The edges are smashed and crumbling from so many collisions. Further in, a tangled mat of pale blue grass (that whines as it is trodden on) covers the island's surface.

At the heart of the island is a thicket of the towering baobab-like scira trees. Slightly smaller shapes move amongst these like huge walking mushrooms with mouths. These are *mu spores*, which defend the luminapples (see below) from intruders. If they catch sight of the Player Characters, they immediately assume that they have come to raid the luminapples and attack.

Four to six mu spores guard each tree. They will not pursue further than the edge of an island.

Mu Spore: CR 21; Colossal plant; HD 35d8+315; hp 472; Init +5; Spd 40 ft.; AC 27, touch –1, flat-footed 27; Base Atk +26; Grp +55; Atk +31 melee (2d6+13/19–20, tendril); Full Atk +31 melee (2d6+13/19–20, 4 tendrils) and +26 melee (4d6+6/19–20, bite); Space/ Reach 30 ft./30 ft.; SA improved grab, spore cough, swallow whole; SQ blindsight 210 ft., damage reduction 10/epic, fast healing 10, plant traits, resistance to acid 20, sticky; AL CN; SV Fort +28, Ref +8, Will +20; Str 36, Dex 5, Con 29, Int 18, Wis 28, Cha 28.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +47, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +13, Hide +35, Intimidate +13, Jump +13, Knowledge (local)

+42, Knowledge (nature) +42, Listen +47, Spot +47; Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Critical (tendril), Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack.

Epic Feats: Epic Reflexes, Epic Toughness (x3), Superior Initiative.

Improved Grab (Ex): Mu spores have Improved Grab with tendril attacks against Gargantuan and smaller opponents. They have the option to grapple as normal, to simply hold the opponent or to transfer it to the mu spore's mouth as a free action. It deals automatic tendril damage on successive rounds with a grapple check.

Spore Cough (Su): Once every 1d4 rounds a mu spore can release a cloud of burrowing spores. This spore cough is treated as a 100-foot-cone breath weapon. The burrowing spores deal 20d8 points of damage to all creatures and structures in the area, or half damage to any creatures that make a Reflex save (DC 36). The save DC is Charisma-based.

Sticky (Ex): Any creature that touches or successfully attacks a mu spore with a melee weapon is subject to a free improved grab check as if the mu spore had successfully attacked the creature with a tendril. A creature wielding a melee weapon must immediately relinquish its grip on its weapon or proceed with the grapple check. If the subject relinquishes its grip on its weapon, the weapon is swallowed the following round. Creatures who attack the mu spore in melee without a weapon they can release, such as those with natural attacks only, do not have this option.

Swallow Whole (Ex): If the mu spore begins its turn with an opponent held in its mouth, it can attempt a new grapple check as though attempting to pin the opponent. If it succeeds, it swallows its prey and the opponent takes bite damage. A swallowed creature is dealt the twice the damage given for the mu spore's bite every round. A swallowed creature is considered grappled, while the spore itself is not. A swallowed creature can try to escape the grapple as normal or try to cut its way free by dealing 33 points of damage with any light piercing or slashing weapon. The former course, if successful, places it in the spore's mouth, where it may be bitten or swallowed again.

The Luminapples

These basketball-sized fruits shed continual golden light. This glow is hard to see with the sky blazing in eighty colours at once but in the dark they shine as brightly as lanterns. When consumed, a luminapple is the equivalent of a *heroes' feast* for one person (caster level 20th). It takes ten minutes to consume and its effects do not begin until those ten minutes are up. The fruit has an odd side effect: a creature benefiting from luminapples begins to shine as if a *light* spell had been cast on them. The mu spores use this glow to tell where an inexperienced raider is hiding.

Each scira tree bears 1d6+8 luminapples at heights of 100–300 feet above the ground. Scira trees are not hard to climb, requiring only a Climb check (DC 15), but the luminapples grow only at the very ends of the branches, where they are flimsiest. A heavy weight put on a branch has a 25% chance per round of causing it to break off.

Communicating with the Mu Spores: If the Player Characters are able to make intelligent conversation with these entities, they can attempt to placate them with Diplomacy checks.

The spores are violently hostile to all strangers. Assuming this can be overcome, they can tell the Player Characters the following:

Raids keep coming from an island that is orbiting on a parallel track to this one but is moving more slowly. The creature making the raids moves too fast for the spores to catch it. The island draws level with this one approximately once every twelve hours. The spores would appreciate it if the Player Characters could finish off the raiding creature. If this is done, then perhaps the spores will provide more help.

The Skeletons in the Briars: The mu spores have no interest in treasure, so when any creature is killed while trying to raid for luminapples, they leave it there to rot. Among the roots of one of the scira trees is the skeleton of some unknown humanoid with a fox-like skull and an otherwise human skeletal system. It wears a suit of *+7 banded mail of sonic resistance* and has a *+3 spiked chain of monstrous humanoid dread* piled under its ribcage. Its bony neck bears a red gold torc with twin fox-head ornaments, worth 18,000 gold pieces.

Non-Player Character Group: The Fruit Raider

The luminapples' delicious taste and magical benefits draw hungry creatures from the forest clumps on other islands, who try to steal them and flee. Sometimes creatures phase in from other planes of existence, purely to harvest the fruit. The mu spores are hard pressed to keep them away.

If the Player Characters wait long enough, the persistent raider that the spores are so annoyed about, an *uvuudaum*, attempts to raid for luminapples. When its island comes close to that of the spores, it bounds across the gap, scurries up the nearest tree and helps itself to the fruit, using *time stop* to escape if it is in any danger.

The uvuudaum is a fearsome opponent in combat, but it is also highly intelligent and will not fight if it does not have to. If threatened, it promptly turns and flees back to its own island, where the Player Characters can pursue it. It has set up a home for itself inside a cave.

The uvuudaum has a roughly humanoid torso and forearms, but its lower body has six additional arms splayed out like those of a crab, instead of legs. Where its head should be, a thick tentacle writhes, with an iron-like spike at the tip.

Uvuudaum: CR 27; Large outsider (evil, extraplanar); HD 38d8+646; hp 817; Init +14; Spd 80 ft., climb 40 ft.; AC 52, touch 23, flat-footed 38; Base Atk +38; Grp +56; Atk +51 melee (10d6+21/19–20 plus Wisdom drain, head spike); Full Atk +51 melee (10d6+21/19–20 plus Wisdom drain, head spike); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA confusion aura, spell-like abilities, Wisdom drain; SQ blindsight 500 ft., damage reduction 10/epic and good, fast healing 20, regeneration 5, resistance to electrical damage 30, spell resistance 39; AL CE; SV Fort +40, Ref +37, Will +41; Str 39, Dex 38, Con 44, Int 32, Wis 38, Cha 46.

Skills & Feats: Balance +18, Climb +32, Concentration +58, Craft (alchemy) +52, Diplomacy +22, Escape Artist +55, Gather Information +22, Hide +51, Intimidate +59, Jump +69, Knowledge (arcana) +52, Knowledge (history) +52, Knowledge (local) +52, Knowledge (religion) +52, Knowledge (the planes) +52, Listen +55, Move Silently +55, Search +52, Sense Motive +55, Spellcraft +56, Spot +55, Swim +55, Tumble +59; Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Epic Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Combat Reflexes, Improved Critical (head spike), Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Spell Stowaway *(time stop)*, Tenacious Magic *(haste)*, Tenacious Magic *(displacement)*, Tenacious Magic *(stoneskin)*.

Confusion Aura (Su): Continuous *confusion* within a 30-foot radius as per the spell: Will save (DC 47) resists. Those affected can make a new save every four rounds to throw off the effect. Once it has successfully resisted, a subject remains immune to the uvuudaum's confusion aura for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Regeneration (Ex): Uvuudaums take normal damage from holy weapons, cold and fire.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *confusion* (DC 32), *dimension door, displacement* (DC 31), *greater dispel magic, haste, invisibility* (DC 30), *lightning bolt* (DC 31), *mage armour, magic missile, polymorph, shield, stoneskin, true strike, web* (DC 30); 3/day – *chain lightning* (DC 34), *cone of cold* (DC 33), *disintegrate* (DC 34), *dominate person* (DC 33), *greater teleport* (DC 35), *plane shift* (DC 35), *prismatic spray* (DC 35), *scrying* (DC 32), *wall of force;* 1/day – *nailed to the sky* (DC 38) (epic spell), *time duplicate* (DC 38) (epic spell), *time stop*. Caster level is 27th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Wisdom Drain (Su): Any creature the uvuudaum hits with its head spike receives a permanent Wisdom score reduction of 2d4 points, or twice that amount on a critical hit; a Fortitude save (DC 47) resists. The uvuudaum regains five lost hit points (or ten on a critical hit) whenever it drains Wisdom, gaining any excess hit points as temporary hit points that last a maximum of one hour. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Location: The Uvuudaum's Cavern

The creature has been busy preparing for something, though it is unclear what. The cavern walls have stone tablets propped against them, with flowing runes etched across the surface. A pile of luminapples has been stacked in the corner, where they are steadily decomposing and leaking phosphorescent juices across the floor. Against the west side of the room is a large stone slab with holes bored into it, as if to hold tools. A selection of glass retorts, alembics and bowls is spread haphazardly across the slab's surface.

The Alchemical Equipment: A successful Craft (alchemy) check (DC 30) establishes that the creature has been trying to distil the juice of the luminapples into an elixir which would turn ordinary life forms into immensely strong mutated versions of their ordinary selves. A small amount (three doses) of the creature's prototype elixir remains in the distillation equipment.

If sampled, this increases the imbibing creature's Strength and Constitution by ten points each (an alchemical bonus) while reducing its Intelligence and Wisdom by ten points, to a minimum of two. The elixir's effects last for ten rounds with a single dose but the creature may never again drink the elixir without the effect becoming permanent. A Fortitude save (DC 35) resists the effect. It seems that the uvuudaum is interested in creating powerful but nearly mindless slave creatures.

The Tablets: The tablets hold research notes, written in an alien scrawl, that explain the purpose of the elixir. A Decipher Script check (DC 20) gives the general gist of these, along with a gloating observation that it will soon become much easier for the uvuudaum race to invade other planes.

An exceptionally good Decipher Script check (DC 40) gives a more detailed version. The delirium of uvuudaum thought cannot be communicated in simple language, so the following is an approximation:

'*The cracks/growths/colours between/above the worlds/spheres/shadows have (are about to) widened/flowered yet again. I was able to penetrate the veil/walk sideways/invert myself with a minimum of effort/exposure. Some force/lever is working to assist us/feed the brain. They are fools/herd/meat: we do not accept lesser/flat/flavourless petitioners/parasites.*'

The Holes in the Bench: These hold dull silvery implements like tuning forks with sharp blades, each the size of a small knife. A Heal check (DC 40) reveals that they are used in extracting glands from living creatures. On closer examination they prove to be made from platinum. If the implements were to be melted down there would be 10,000 gold pieces' worth of raw platinum here. In addition, one of the holes holds a *wand of dispel magic* (caster level 10th), which can be found with a Search check (DC 20).

Event: The Ship Passes

At a suitable point in the action, such as when the Player Characters are fighting hard against several foes or clinging for their lives to the edge of an island, the following happens:

The shape of a sailing vessel comes into view, silhouetted against the psychedelic sky. She is flying at full sail in defiance of gravity, coming straight for you. You can make out a figure at the prow. It looks like a woman in a red dress.

If the Player Characters stay around as the ship approaches:

The ship comes closer and slows down as it does so. A knotted rope is thrown over the side and trails through the grass. A yell comes from above: 'All aboard who's coming aboard!'

This ship is the *Golden Pomegranate*, crewed by the Bards of the Floating College. Depending on the circumstances, they are either rescuing the Player Characters or just inviting them up for a drink.

Non-Player Character Group: The Bards of the Floating College

This gang of vagabonds is dedicated to one goal: going where nobody else goes, seeing the sights, playing music and moving on. They are wandering bards who are not content to travel only one plane. They want to visit all of the most fantastic, most surreal places they can. They believe that there is nothing better in life than to stand in an unexplored alien environment with a mug of beer, singing the good old songs with friends.

Performance is everything to the Bards of the Floating College. If there is an audience, they will perform, whether that audience is made up of appreciative humanoids or purple tree frogs. As they are highly chaotic, they are not above helping themselves to other people's property before they leave. This often lands them in trouble, but they believe that if you keep moving, people eventually give up the chase.

They have come to Serabbanin to serenade the local wildlife and explore the islands. So far they have stolen a bunch of luminapples and been chased by mu spores, who are still furious and will attack them on sight.

The head of the Floating College is Sidney Scemp, a grinning narrow-faced guitarist with bleached white hair and a small goatee. He wears a bright scarlet evening dress and an assortment of gold jewellery to go with it, and is in fact the 'woman' seen when the *Golden Pomegranate* first appears. The rest of the bards – Kelvin, Mortimer, Scapegrace, Jason, Willowbrook and Moshell – dress in a similarly anarchic manner. Scapegrace goes naked but for a leather pouch, while Moshell favours a suit of woven vines and leaves that makes him look like a small shambling mound. Mortimer is the helmsman, piloting the ship between the islands of rock.

The *Golden Pomegranate*: The ship seems to be a perfectly ordinary brigantine, apart from its strange ability to fly through the air. Mortimer handles the helm with expert skill, weaving out of the paths of oncoming islands. The ship's movement does not seem to be connected to the winds of chaos blowing around it; Mortimer can steer it in any direction. The ship has a maximum speed of 300 feet per round and can accelerate or decelerate at a rate of 40 feet per round. The anchor capstan and the helm are both secured with heavy adamantine

AB

chains and a mind-fuddlingly complex lock when the ship is anchored; the lock can only be opened with an Open Lock check (DC 60). This ensures that if anyone tries to steal the ship while the bards are insensible with drink, it will only sail in circles.

Interacting with the Bards: The Bards' interaction with the Player Characters depends on how enjoyable they find their company. The Bards are determined to find a suitable spot to play, monsters or no monsters, and if the Players start making noises about ancient artefacts before this happens, the Bards grow impatient with them. Once the performance is over, the Bards will happily attempt to navigate the chaos storm, as there may be interesting sights within; but until then, the performance takes priority.

What the Bards Know: The Bards have heard that there is some terrible chaotic force here but they are not especially interested in it except as a legend to tell people around the campfire. They have come for the scenery, not for objects of power.

If asked where they think the Eye might be, the Bards look out at the central chaos storm and silently point to it. It makes sense for the Eye to be at the eye of the storm.

Typical Bard of the Floating College, Male Human Brd21: CR 21; Medium humanoid; HD 21d6; hp 73; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 25, touch 11, flat-footed 24; Base Atk +16; Grp +17; Atk +22 melee (1d8+6/17–20, *+5 keen longsword*) or +22 ranged (1d6+5/x3, *+5 shortbow*); Full Atk +22/+17/+12 melee (1d8+6/17–20, *+5 keen longsword*) or +22/+17/+12 ranged (1d6+5/x3, *+5 shortbow*); SA *fascinate, mass suggestion, suggestion*; SQ bardic music, bardic knowledge, countersong, inspire competence, inspire courage +4, inspire greatness, inspire heroics; AL CN; SV Fort +6, Ref +13, Will +14; Str 13, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 20.

Skills & Feats: Appraise +5, Bluff +19, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +7, Gather Information +11, Intimidate +7, Listen +8, Move Silently +13, Perform (drum) +29, Perform (guitar) +29, Perform (sing) +42, Perform (violin) +42, Profession (sailor) +26, Sense Motive +10, Sleight of Hand +13, Tumble +11, Use Magic Device +9; Blind-Fight, Cleave, Epic Skill Focus (Perform), Improved Initiative, Persuasive, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Skill Focus (Perform (sing)).

Spells known (4/6/5/5/5/5/4, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th level *– daze, detect magic, lullaby, mage hand, message, open/close;* 1st *– animate rope, cure light wounds, feather fall, hideous laughter, lesser confusion;* 2nd *– eagle's splendour, enthral, hold person, mirror image, pyrotechnics;* 3rd *– charm monster, crushing despair, displacement, glibness, slow;* 4th *– break enchantment, cure critical wounds, dimension door, greater invisibility, rainbow pattern;* 5th *– greater heroism, mass cure light wounds, mass suggestion, shadow evocation, song of discord;* 6th *– eyebite, greater shout, mass cure moderate wounds, project image.*

Equipment & Treasure: +3 buckler, +5 keen longsword, +5 shortbow, +7 studded leather armour, arrows (20), masterwork instrument as appropriate.

Sidney Scemp, Male Human Brd21/Ftr5: CR 26; Medium humanoid; HD 21d6+42 plus 5d10+10; hp 153; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 32, touch 11, flat-footed 31; Base Atk +18; Grp +22; Atk +25 melee (1d8+7/19–20 plus 3d6 sonic, *+3 longsword of sonic blast*) or +24 ranged (1d6+5/x3, *+5 shortbow*); Full Atk +25/+20/+15 melee (1d8+7/19–20 plus 3d6 sonic, *+3 longsword of sonic blast*) or +24/+19/+14 ranged (1d6+5/x3, *+5 shortbow*); SA *fascinate, mass suggestion, suggestion*; SQ bardic knowledge, bardic music, countersong, inspire competence, inspire courage +4, inspire greatness, inspire heroics; AL CN; SV Fort +11, Ref +18, Will +17; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Bluff +24, Concentration +17, Diplomacy +9, Gather Information +24, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (the planes) +17, Perform (sing) +30, Sleight of Hand +12, Swim +12, Tumble +11; Deafening Song, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Lasting Performance, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Perform (sing)).

Spells known (4/5/5/5/4/4/4, save DC 13 + spell level): 0th *– daze, detect magic, lullaby, open/close, resistance, summon instrument;* 1st *– feather fall, hideous laughter, lesser confusion, remove fear, ventriloquism;* 2nd *– alter self, animal trance, hold person, mirror image, shatter;* 3rd *– blink, displacement, gaseous form, glibness, see invisibility;* 4th *– dimension door, freedom of movement, greater invisibility, hallucinatory terrain, zone of silence;* 5th *– greater dispel magic, greater heroism, mind fog, shadow evocation, song of discord;* 6th *– animate objects, mass cat's grace, mass eagle's splendour, project image.*

Equipment & Treasure: +6 buckler, +3 longsword of sonic blast, +5 shortbow, +11 studded leather armour, arrows (20).

Event: The Performance

The Bards eventually decide on a suitable island for their performance, drop anchor and climb down. They then stand as close to the edge of the island as they can and sing out into the stormy chaos, after which they get roaring drunk and fall asleep. The Player Characters are welcome to join in.

The Uninvited Passenger: During the performance, an unpleasant visitor observes the gathering, incorporeal among the weedy grasses. This is Smorog-Yin, a brain collector, greatly troubled by the recent disruption to the planar matrix. Smorog-Yin is now phasing between the planes hoping to find a creature who knows more about the planequake than he does. This collection of travellers is perfect. If he can extract their brains, Smorog-Yin can find out even more about the ongoing disaster and perhaps find a way to avoid it.

The brain collector creeps aboard the *Golden Pomegranate* and settles down to wait for its moment. Once half the crewmembers are asleep – there is no day or night here, so they work in shifts – he sucks out Scapegrace's brain. Nobody notices at first, until they shake Scapegrace to wake him up and his body falls out of his hammock with a horrid thump. Unless the brain collector is tracked down and dealt with, the next to go is Willowbrook. On the following sleep shift, the collector comes after one of the Player Characters.

If the Player Characters defeat Smorog-Yin and prevent him from escaping, he telepathically pleads for his life, offering to share the knowledge in its numerous brains. Smorog-Yin wants to be taken to the Assembly so that he can give an account of what he knows. The remaining Bards want him dead, as he has killed their friends.

The Bards may well finish the creature off on their own despite what the Player Characters may want. They will *not* take Smorog-Yin with them into the storm. At most, they may be persuaded to drop the Player Characters off on the nearest island along with the wounded Smorog-Yin. In this case, the Player Characters will have to make their own way into the chaos storm.

Smorog-Yin has been seeking out knowledge from any bards and loremasters as it can find, and has learned the following from its absorbed brains. It will use this information to plead for its life.

- There is a darkness outside creation, which despises and envies the manifest worlds. It is said that this darkness has sworn to tear the multiverse down and replace it with a creation of its own, in which its own favoured ones shall be dominant.

- The eye of Igrath *does* have the potential to regenerate itself into the Tenebrae it once was. It lies at the heart of Serabbanin, which is believed to be calm. Although the chaos storm rages for miles around it, anyone who persists through the gales will eventually break through into quieter spaces.

- Most creatures believe that the Planequake is a recent event but they are wrong. The planar destruction has been taking place steadily over the last year. Whoever is doing this has stealthily removed key planes that weaken the whole structure, but do not have dramatic effects like the recent quakes. The objective is obviously the total collapse of the multiverse.

- On the bright side, the brain collector knows of one way for a creature to gain precise insight into the structure of the planes. There is a sub-plane called the Machine of Nonachranon, built by the Grey Mages of Gravis Thanta. The machine was built to study the universe and make predictions based on its observations. It is a divinatory system second to none. If the Machine were consulted, it should be possible to identify where and when the enemy will strike next and be there to surprise him.

Smorog-Yin, Brain Collector: CR 26; Huge aberration (extraplanar, incorporeal); HD 32d8+192; hp 336; Init +12; Spd 60 ft. or via *dimension door*; AC 35, touch 35, flat-footed 31; Base Atk +24; Grp —; Atk +26 melee (4d10+12 plus poison, bite); Full Atk +26 melee (4d10+12 plus poison, bite) and +21 melee touch attack (2d10 plus ability drain, 10 head-tentacles); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; SA extract brains (ranged attack), poison, spells; SQ amorphous physiology, damage reduction 10/epic, darkvision 60 ft., *dimensional travel*, incorporeal traits, manifest maw, spell resistance 30; AL CN; SV Fort +16, Ref +14, Will +23; Str —, Dex 19, Con 22, Int 20, Wis 20, Cha 17.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +41, Hide +39, Knowledge (arcana) +40, Knowledge (the planes) +40, Move Silently +39, Search +40,

Spellcraft +40; Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Maximise Spell, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack.

Epic Feats: Superior Initiative.

Note: If any of the Starborn have their brains harvested by Smorog-Yin, they cannot be resurrected while the brain is in the creature. Smorog-Yin can communicate telepathically with any creature that has a language within 100 feet. Its natural weapons are treated as epic for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Amorphous Physiology (Ex): Smorog-Yin is immune to critical hits, death from massive damage, sneak attacks and coup de grace.

Dimensional Travel (Sp): Smorog-Yin can cast a quickened *dimension door* once per round, and can cast *teleport without error* or *plane shift* at will as a move-equivalent action.

Extract Brains (Sp): Once every 1d4 rounds, as a full-round action, Smorog-Yin can extract the brain from a target creature in his line of sight. This attack is psionic in nature and can be blocked by a *dimensional anchor* currently in force on the target. The target gets an Will save (DC 31) to resist the extraction. If the save fails, the brain is drawn out intact through the skull by extradimensional means and sucked up by the brain collector, lodging in a storage sac above and behind its eyes. If the save succeeds, the target is dealt 9d6 points of damage and is stunned for 1d4+1 rounds. Smorog-Yin can collect and store up to a maximum of thirteen brains at a time, and in fact each brain *less* than the full thirteen bestows one negative level on Smorog-Yin, though these never convert to actual level loss. He is free to draw on all the Knowledge skills of each brain he currently has stored, using the base ranks in a skill possessed by each brain and adjusted by Smorog-Yin's own skill modifiers for the Knowledge skill in question (or his Intelligence modifier, for skills in which he has no ranks). The save DC is Intelligence-based.

Head-Tentacles (Ex): Smorog-Yin's facial tentacles strike with a touch attack for 2d10 points of desiccation damage. In addition, each successful tentacle attack permanently drains one point of Strength, one point of Dexterity and one point of Constitution.

Incorporeal: Smorog-Yin can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better weapons, magic or psionics, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. He can pass through solid objects at will and his own attacks pass through armour (except for his bite attack, which is treated as a corporeal attack). He always moves silently unless he chooses otherwise.

Manifest Maw: Though he is an incorporeal creature, Smorog-Yin can manifest his mouth in corporeal form as a standard action. While so manifested, the mouth can deliver bite attacks against corporeal creatures or pick up objects. The mouth bites as if it had Strength 35.

Poison (Ex): Smorog-Yin has a venomous bite. On a failed Fortitude save (DC 32), the victim loses half his current Constitution, and must save again one minute later or lose half of his remaining Constitution. If the character survives, he heals the ability damage at the normal rate. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Spells (Sp): Smorog-Yin casts spells as a 13th level sorcerer.

Spells known (6/7/7/7/6/6/4, save DC 13 + spell level): 0th – *dancing lights, daze, detect magic, light, mage hand, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st – *identify, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, shield, true strike;* 2nd – *alter self, detect thoughts, mirror image, see invisibility, silent image;* 3rd – *dispel magic, haste, major image, suggestion;* 4th – *charm monster, resilient sphere, solid fog, stoneskin;* 5th – *dominate person, interposing hand, waves of fatigue;* 6th – *greater heroism repulsion.*

Smorog-Yin is a roughly spherical, bulbous horror, orange-yellow in hue. Its mouth is a series of concentric fanged rings, like that of a lamprey. Short, rope-like tentacles draggle from the thing's body. It has four football-sized eyes, yellow with red irises, that bulge like those of a frog. Beyond these are hideous animated bulges that twitch and squirm as if a tiny creature were struggling under a rubber sheet. These are the brains that it has extracted. It moves by scuttling with alarming speed on its twelve legs, which resemble those of a crab or lobster. It is an extreme example of an aberrant life form; it has no constant anatomy, rearranging its organs at will to make itself practically impossible to slay.

Event: A Thief in the Night

Willowbrook attempts to steal an item from one of the Player Characters while they are on the *Golden Pomegranate.* If this is discovered, Sidney Scemp dismisses it, saying that the Player Characters are clearly 'too attached to material possessions' and should just relax and enjoy the ride.

Rumble: If there is trouble and it seems a fight is about to break out, the Bards stand together against the Player Characters. They have a well-established routine for getting rid of unwanted passengers. Sidney Scemp shouts 'Manatees off the port bow!' which is everyone's cue to grab hold of something secure. A Spot check (DC 20) notices that the crew is doing this.

On the next round, Mortimer spins the wheel and the ship lists violently as if capsized by a wave. It turns completely upside down, coming around and righting itself the next round. While the ship is inverted, any creatures who do not have hold of a secure object fall off the deck and into space. Those who are adjacent to such an item may make Reflex saves (DC 25) to grab them as the ship tilts.

The Chaos Storm

At the heart of the plane, a dark cloud like a revolving disc obscures the frenzied colour changes in the sky. The roaring of the storm is like that of a maelstrom at sea. There are no stone islands in the cloud; the force of the vortex has flung them all out beyond its rim. Only the fine dust of the cloud, swirling like the billow of stars in a black galaxy, is left. You cannot tell whether the cloud would tear your flesh to the bone if you entered it, or if it would be soft as windblown dust.

If they are not on board the *Golden Pomegranate*, the Player Characters must use some form of magical transportation, such as *fly*, to enter the storm. There is no other way to penetrate the murk.

Inside the Storm: Being inside the chaos storm is like standing on a cliff top on a windy night. Visibility is reduced to twenty feet, so navigation by eye is impossible. It is surprisingly bearable until the first wave of chaos hits.

Waves of Chaos

The storm is shaped like a galaxy, and has 'arms' of rippling force that scythe around its central hub. These arms wash over anything inside the storm, bombarding it with intense chaotic energy. The effect of the energy depends on the type of wave that hits the Player Characters. The Games Master may either roll 1d8 to find out the type of wave (see Chaos Waves table below) or simply choose.

At the outer limits of the storm, waves are infrequent; the closer one comes to the hub, the more frequent the waves are. The number of rounds between waves is roughly equal to one's distance in miles from the hub, until the 20-mile limit is reached, beyond which lies the eye of the storm. Chaos waves cannot be avoided so long as one is inside the storm. Each wave lasts for 1d4+2 rounds, after which it goes roaring away into the dark.

It is next to impossible to discern when the waves are coming, because of the darkness, noise and turbulence. However, attunement to the environment can help. Creatures can sense the approach of a wave with a successful Survival check (DC 40). This gives the creature 1d4 rounds of warning before the wave strikes.

Magical Effects: Each chaos wave has a magical effect. Creatures not exposed to the wave do not suffer its effects (though the item screening them may). On the *Golden Pomegranate*, after the first wave, all of the Bards but Mortimer the helmsman and Sidney Scemp go below decks; Mortimer stays above to pilot the ship and Scemp does so because he wants to see what will happen next.

Physical Impact: As well as its magical effect, a chaos wave has an obvious physical impact. There is massive turbulence as the winds suddenly increase in strength, sending unsecured objects flying and knocking airborne creatures off course. Creatures attempting to cast or concentrate on spells must make Concentration checks.

The Bards Strike: If there has been antagonism between the Player Characters and the Bards of the Floating College, the Bards use the distraction of the chaos waves to attack the Player Characters and overcome them if they can. Captives are thrown in the hold; the Bards can sell them as slaves in an extraplanar market or abandon them in the storm's eye as the whim takes them.

Chaos Waves

d8	Wave Type
1	Antimagic Wave
2	Transmutation Wave
3	Petrification Wave
4	Shockwave
5	Compulsion Wave
6	Corrosion Wave
7	Telepathic Wave
8	Protoplasmic Wave

1. Antimagic Wave

As the wave hits, ultraviolet traces skitter across the objects in its path. Your magical items flare an intense purple and vibrate in your grip.

The area is bathed in a field that suppresses magic exactly as per an *antimagic field* produced by a 30th level caster. Creatures using spells to fly may find themselves falling as their magic is suppressed. If they are travelling in the *Golden Pomegranate*, the whole ship (as a magic item) may be suppressed (it has an effective caster level of 24th), in which case it lists wildly and falls, the stern dropping faster than the bow, so that the whole ship is soon plummeting on its end.

2. Transmutation Wave

All of the organic matter you can see – your clothes, your skin, the straps of your weapons – glows a boiling lime green.

Living creatures in the path of the wave suffer a *baneful polymorph* effect as per the spell cast by a 30th level caster. The save DC is 20, as the spell is effectively heightened to 10th level. Instead of small amphibians, they are transmuted into blobs of protoplasm like cells enlarged to the size of basketballs. The effect is otherwise identical to that of the spell and can be removed in the same manner.

Non-living organic matter in the wave's path is transformed to different organic matter as if by a *polymorph any object* spell (CL 30th, save DC 20). Clothing made from cotton might be turned into bacon strips, or leather shoes into tree bark. Attended items and magical items may make saves against the effect. Mineral objects are not affected.

3. Petrification Wave
As the wave hits, everything around you becomes abruptly monochrome, showing you the world in shades of dreary grey and black.

Living creatures in the wave's path are struck by a *stone to flesh* effect as per the spell cast by a 30th level caster. The save DC is 20, as the spell is effectively heightened to 10th level. Stone creatures fall like rocks, vanishing into the turbulence.

4. Shockwave
An impact hits that is like being slammed by an invisible girder!

The wave is composed of nearly solid force, dense enough to bludgeon targets but fluid enough not to bear them along with it. Creatures in the path of the wave are dealt 20d6 points of bludgeoning damage, with a Reflex save (DC 20) allowed for half damage. Structures or vessels such as the *Golden Pomegranate* may be crippled by a wave of this kind. The helmsman must make a Profession (sailor) check (DC 30); failure damages the ship, smashing a hole in the hull. Failure by more than ten sunders her completely, leaving nothing but a drift of falling magical debris.

5. Compulsion Wave
The wave washes over you with a strangely gentle tingling feeling. Objects around you are briefly highlighted with lilac fluorescence.

The wave has a mind-affecting effect as if by a *suggestion* spell from a 30th level caster. A Will save (DC 20) resists the effect of this effectively heightened spell. Creatures affected believe that the storm is about to tear them in pieces and that they should withdraw as fast as possible. This is not a *fear* effect, but rather a sense that the storm is becoming more and more violent and hazardous.

6. Corrosion Wave
A raw acidic smell hits you as a wave engulfs you. Sword blades, belt buckles and shield bosses pulse with a sickly brown glow like candlelight through a beer bottle.

The wave has the effect of a *rusting grasp* spell. Magic items are immune as usual, but all non-magical ferrous items the size of a sword or smaller rust away. Larger items are only partly corroded. If the Player Characters are on board the *Golden Pomegranate*, they see the anchor corrode and fall off, followed by part of the railing along the edge of the deck; these parts of the ship are non-magical and thus vulnerable.

7. Telepathic Wave
In the instant of the wave's impact, you suddenly become able to see through matter. You can see your own bones through your flesh, the coins sitting at the bottom of a pouch, the last meal your comrades ate digesting in their bellies. This unsettling vision swiftly passes, leaving odd aches in your heads.

All creatures in the path of the wave become temporarily telepathic to a mild extent as if *detect thoughts* had been cast upon them by a 30th level caster. A Will save (DC 20) resists the effect of this effectively heightened spell. Player Characters are suddenly able to hear each other's thoughts and those of other creatures nearby. This ability cannot be suppressed. Thoughts are heard whether the creature wants to hear them or not.

8. Protoplasmic Wave
There is a bursting, splashing sound as the wave passes, as if of some huge vessel were spilling its contents. Although there seems to be no tangible residue, it feels as if something wet and slimy has flooded over you.

The protoplasmic wave leaves a trail of jelly in its wake, the chaotic beginnings of new life. The space around the Player Characters is briefly filled with organic blobs of living matter 1d4x10 feet apart. These primitive life forms are harmless, though they look like some sort of ooze creatures.

Location: The Eye of the Storm

Just as another wave seems about to bear down on you, you pass out of the howling turbulence and into a sea of calm blue light. You float effortlessly. The sound of the chaos storm is muted and unreal. Other than some distant floating spherical objects, there is nothing here at all. It seems strange that such glorious peace can be found at the heart of chaos.

This peace is not likely to last long, as the spherical objects are more than they seem. They are the Dreams of Igrath (see below). The Eye itself is at the precise geometric centre of the circular eye of the storm. A Player Character trying to work out where this is may make an Intelligence check (DC 20) to calculate the point precisely.

In this section of the plane, subjective directional gravity applies. Characters are no longer at any risk of falling and can manoeuvre freely.

Non-Player Character Group: The Dreams of Igrath

As the scrap of flesh that was once Igrath slumbers, it dreams of opening and ravaging the universe. In its dreams it is a monstrous eye-like fiend lacerating reality with beams of disruptive power.

The chaos-enriched fields of energy around the Eye give hideous form to those dreams, manifesting them as vast eyeball-like aberrations. These drift through the chaos field, consuming one another and sometimes venturing into the storm, where they are eventually caught up in the waves and destroyed. A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 40), Knowledge (religion) check (DC 40) or Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 40) identifies the aberrations as Igrath's dreams given form.

These dreams, gibbering orbs, hover like malformed asteroids in the space around the Eye. It seems that none is close enough to notice the Player Characters if they approach; but as luck would have it, Igrath stirs in his sleep as they come nearer and a new orb is dreamed into being a mere fifty feet away from the Eye.

Dream of Igrath, Gibbering Orb: CR 27; Huge aberration; HD 27d8+216; hp 337; Init +20; Spd 5 ft., fly 20 ft. (good); AC 48, touch 32, flat-footed 36; Base Atk +20; Grp +39; Atk +31 ranged touch (special, 24 eye rays) and +28 melee (2d8+5/19–20, 12 bites); Full Atk +31 ranged touch (special, 24 eye rays) and +28 melee (2d8+5/19–20, 12 bites); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; SA eye rays, gibbering, improved grab, spell-like abilities, swallow whole; SQ all-around vision, amorphous, damage reduction 10/epic, flight, spell resistance 37; AL CE; SV Fort +21, Ref +21, Will +24; Str 32, Dex 35, Con 27, Int 40, Wis 24, Cha 22.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +38, Escape Artist +42, Jump -4, Knowledge (arcana) +37, Hide +34, Listen +37, Move Silently +34, Search +37, Speak Language (any five), Spot +37; Flyby Attack, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Multiattack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (eye ray).

Epic Feats: Epic Fortitude, Polyglot, Superior Initiative.

Note: A gibbering orb can speak all languages. Its natural weapons are treated as epic for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction. The gibbering orb has the ability to bite its foes by extending a pseudopod with one of its mouths protruding from the end. It can extend four of these at any one foe, or a total of twelve in any given round. At the same time, its Legion of eyes have the ability to cast a host of spells at a rapid rate.

All-Around Vision (Ex): The gibbering orb's many eyes give it a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks.

Amorphous (Ex): A gibbering orb is not subject to critical hits. It has no clear front or back, so it cannot be flanked.

Eye Rays (Su): Two dozen of the eyes can each produce a magical ray each round, with each eye emulating a spell from among the list of spells below as if cast by a 27th level caster. The save DCs, where applicable, are 16 + spell level. A gibbering orb has no directional limitations on where it can point its eye rays, because the eyes orbiting around its body drift and float wherever needed. However, a gibbering orb can never aim more than five rays at any single target, due to limitations of aiming. All rays have a range of 150 feet. Each of these effects functions as a ray, regardless of the normal parameters of the spell it resembles. That is, each is usable against a single target and requires a ranged touch attack. The eye rays are: *cone of cold, disintegrate, dominate monster, energy drain, feeblemind, finger of death, flesh to stone, greater dispelling, harm, hold monster, horrid wilting, implosion, inflict critical wounds, irresistible dance, lightning bolt, mage's disjunction, magic missile, polymorph any object, power word blind, power word kill, power word stun, prismatic spray, slay living* and *temporal stasis* The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Flight (Ex): The gibbering orb's body is naturally buoyant. This buoyancy allows it to *fly* as per the spell, as a free action, at a speed of 20 feet. This buoyancy also grants it a permanent *feather fall* effect with personal range.

Gibbering (Su): The cacophony of speech emanating from the scores of mouths that make up the orb forces any creature within 60 feet of the creature to succeed at a Will save (DC 38) each round or suffer the effects of an *insanity* spell. The save DC is Intelligence-based.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the gibbering orb must hit with a bite attack. If it gets a hold, the orb automatically deals bite damage and can attempt to swallow whole.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – two stolen spells or spell-like abilities per round. The caster level is 27th; the save DC is 16 + spell level.

Swallow Whole (Ex): A gibbering orb can attempt to swallow a Large or smaller opponent by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent is dealt 4d8 points of constriction damage plus 3d10 points of acid damage per round. A swallowed creature can cut its way out using claws or light slashing weapons to deal 20 points of damage in a single blow (AC 16, DR 10/epic still applies). Once the creature exits, the fluid-like body structure of the orb closes the wound; other swallowed opponents must cut their own ways out. When a creature dies from being swallowed whole (or when a creature killed by the gibbering orb in some other fashion is eaten by it), the gibbering orb absorbs the creature's known spells, prepared spells and spell-like abilities. The orb can use any two of those abilities per round as a free action. Each originates from an eye that is not producing an eye ray (see below) that round. Stolen spells and spell-like abilities are lost after 24 hours.

Event: Finding the Eye

The Eye of Igrath is a Diminutive item floating in the void. To find the Eye, the Player Characters must be in the right general area (the precise centre of the sea of calm) and either succeed at a Spot check (DC 35) or Search check (DC 35) or use Divination magic.

The object before you is no larger than a sling bullet. It is a leathery, shrivelled ball about as frightening to look at as a dead mouse, yet you know it is responsible for a chaos storm as large as one of the countries of Ashfar. You cannot tell whether it has shrunk over the aeons or whether Igrath himself was no larger than a tall human.

The ball has a cleft across it: its eyelids, evidently, pressed together. Would the whole plane really be dragged down into entropy and ruin if the eye opened? You have no way to tell. At least, though, you know this much: whatever may be causing the destruction of the planes, it is not the Eye of Igrath.

Examining the Eye

The Eye feels cold and dead to the touch, but sudden alarming motion can be felt as the eyeball moves around inside its skin casing, twitching in its sleep.

Investigation reveals an overwhelmingly strong magical aura emanating from the Eye. It is also apparent that the Eye is a *who*, not a *what*. It is a creature and not, as the Player Characters have been led to believe, an artefact.

If the Player Characters use *divination* to investigate it further, they find that it is completely dormant. It has no surface thoughts, only deep dreams of awakening and laying waste to the multiverse. It is, apparently, possessed of incredible regenerative powers, but these are suppressed while it is asleep. Were it to awaken, it would rebuild the remainder of its body in seconds.

Unfortunately, there is no clue as to what would (or could) awaken the Eye. Being handled does not wake it and no amount of physical damage or magical energy does any harm to it; though the Games Master can have the eyelid tremble a little, as if about to awaken, if the Player Characters are silly enough to try this. Not even the gods know what might cause Igrath to awaken, though they are not willing to take chances, as events soon reveal.

Aftermath

The Eye of Igrath, unlike the other items in this chapter, is harmless in its current state. Its ability to create gibbering orbs ceases once it is removed from Serabbanin.

If the Player Characters do as they have been asked and bring the Eye back to the Legion of the Realm Imponderable, one of the black-armoured figures extends a claw to receive it and nods in satisfaction. He then hisses to the Player Characters, 'You must not watch. It would not be good for you to see.' The Legion then troop back into their bone dwelling.

If the Player Characters watch anyway, they see one of the Legion reach up and open its helmet. Blinding light pours out and it is impossible to see what is inside. The Legion member takes the Eye between a finger and thumb and drops it into the helmet. There is a faint squeal like that of a deflating balloon, and then silence.

At the next meeting of the Assembly, the Legion announces that the Eye of Igrath no longer poses a threat to life in the multiverse.

Steel Never Sleeps

Summary: A new faction, the Swarm of Ezziunnun, arrives at the Skull. The Swarm tells a tale of a world devoured by raging darkness consuming all in its path. The Player Characters must investigate immediately if they are to find out what is causing this and how it is doing so. They may be unable to prevent the death of an entire plane but they may also be able to learn essential clues about the methods the ravagers are using to cause the annihilation.

The conflict that follows may end with the plane being ripped apart as the Player Characters struggle to escape in time, or it may end with the plane saved and the Swarm of Ezziunnun made new and loyal allies.

The Coming of the Swarm

This event allows the Player Characters their first glimpse of the destruction as it unfolds.

Event: A Gate Opens

Across the Skull of Paithah, a hunting horn sounds. Hygrave and his Huntsmen are sounding the alarm. The cry goes up: 'Gate! Gate! *There is a* gate *opening upon the Skull's brow!*'

Sure enough there is a fiery hoop, growing brighter each second, on the ridge of bone above the hollow vault where the buildings are. With a whipcrack sound of folding space, something heaves itself through. It resembles a large hybrid insect of no specific type, with a striped yellow and black body like that of a wasp or bee and the claws and sting of a scorpion. Its eyes are multifaceted, the body seething with clouds of tiny insects. On its back, great translucent wings twitch.

With grotesque speed for something so freakish, it begins to clamber over the side of the Skull, apparently bound for the bone dwellings. Its wings spread and begin to whir.

This is the Swarm of Ezziunnun, a vermiurge (differing slightly in appearance from the usual). It has come here to seek refuge, fearing that its plane will be destroyed. The Swarm is terrified of the Huntsmen's weapons. It heads straight for the houses so that it can speak to someone who is not warlike.

What happens next depends upon the Player Characters' involvement. The Huntsmen – especially Hygrave, who is urged on by his spear – see the Swarm as an immediate threat. It has not announced itself intelligibly and is clearly making for the centre of the settlement.

Worse, its path takes it through the region where the Aerial Demons have moored Old Bloaty. As it flies past, the demons are subjected to its cloud of insects – though they do not attack, they are still irritating – and take off after it in fury.

There are thus two factions intent on killing the Swarm. If the Player Characters join in, they can fight for as many

rounds as the Games Master wishes to allow (gaining the respect of Hygrave's Huntsmen and the Aerial Demons) before the Philosophers and Lady Myonatix arrive and beg them to stop. If they try to *prevent* the Huntsmen and the demons from killing the Swarm, they have several rounds of heated argument on their hands before the Philosophers arrive and try to settle everything down.

The Swarm of Ezziunnun, Vermiurge: CR 24; Large aberration; HD 42d8+546; hp 735; Init +11; Spd 50 ft., fly 90 ft. (perfect); AC 40, touch 16, flat-footed 37; Base Atk +31; Grp +47; Atk +43 melee (1d6+12/19–20 plus poison, sting); Full Atk +43 melee (1d6+12/19–20 plus poison, sting) and 4 pincers +41 melee (2d8+6/19–20, 4 pincers) and +40 melee (3d6+6 plus poison, bite); SA aura of doom, concealing aura, frightful presence, poison, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10/epic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 10, immune to mind-affecting effects, low-light vision, scent, spell resistance 34; AL LN; SV Fort +29, Ref +21, Will +38; Str 34, Dex 25, Con 36, Int 14, Wis 40, Cha 44.

Skills & Feats: Heal +24, Hide +33, Jump +45, Knowledge (nature) +34, Listen +47, Move Silently +33, Spot +47; Alertness, Blinding Speed, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (pincers), Improved Critical (sting), Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (pincers), Weapon Focus (sting).

Event: Parley with the Swarm

If the Swarm survives long enough to talk peacefully with the Player Characters, they can learn the following from it.

- It comes from a plane called Har'Ahano where invertebrate life is dominant. Many swarms have achieved sentience. On its own world, it is the honorary king of the Bee Nation.
- The bees have always been credited with the power to look into the future. They are greatly upset, and insist that the end of the world is about to come. None of the other swarms take them seriously. The Swarm of Ezziunnun promised that it would consult with the Philosophers of Arithmea and find out what was happening. Arithmea was empty, so it came here.
- So far, nothing has happened on the world of Har'Ahano, but the bees are still in turmoil. They whine that everything is doomed and that nothing has any chance to save itself. It will all end in raging chaos.

If the Swarm is killed, then the only lead the Player Characters have is to examine the body. A Knowledge (nature) check (DC 35) or Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 35) tells the examining character that the creature is a vermiurge, probably from the plane of Har'Ahano. The Player Characters can still travel there but, without the information they could have had from the Swarm, they are much less likely to be able to make a difference.

Countdown to Destruction: The Player Characters now have very limited time. The bees were right; the drow are planning the destruction of Har'Ahano even now, with the collusion of the great spiders who dwell there. The drow have promised the spiders a world of their own and a far greater destiny if they give their assistance.

If the Player Characters do not thwart the drow plan to destroy Har'Ahano within twelve hours of the arrival of the Swarm, the plane is destroyed.

Event: Visiting Har'Ahano

The plane of Har'Ahano contains one world, one sun and three lifeless moons. The world is almost completely overgrown with forest, with only a few patches of bare ground at the poles, the equator and anywhere the terrain is hilly or mountainous.

There are no artificial structures, only the signs of verminous habitations: termite mounds, wasp nests, rotten logs humming with bee colonies and so on. The entire world seems to thrum with a low, maddening drone as billions of insects live out their lives. Mammal life does not seem to have progressed beyond rat-like organisms and archaeopteryx-like birds.

The only other forms of life thriving on Har'Ahano are carnivorous plants, as there is so much insect life to consume.

Hive Minds: The vermin of Har'Ahano are individually mindless, just as normal vermin. However, they possess the inherent ability to function as a hive mind, with typical Intelligence and Charisma scores of 8 to 10. Each colony of vermin counts as a person in its own right.

Paragon Vermin: Vermin that do not have hive societies, such as scorpions and spiders, instead produce paragon creatures which have the ability to communicate with vermin of their type. Unlike ordinary vermin, they have an Intelligence score (usually 15) and are *not* mindless.

The Nations: Although there are vermin of many different types in all areas, there are official nations that the vermiurges have agreed will be dominated by one

vermin type. The Swarm of Ezziunnun is in charge of the Bee Nation. Other nations are dominated by spiders, scorpions, termites, centipedes and beetles.

Location: The Bee Nation

The territory of the Bee Nation, from whence the Swarm has come, is a realm of meadows and forests like a surreal, exaggerated version of some pastoral landscape painting. The flowers are unnaturally large and brightly coloured. So long as the Player Characters remain within the Bee Nation, they are not attacked by any of the local vermin, on the orders of the Swarm. The vermin attempt to make them as welcome as they can, with repeated gifts of honey (as they do not have anything else to offer).

Talking to the Bees: The Player Characters can tell that the bees are upset, as they swarm around angrily as if someone has kicked over their hives. The Swarm can interpret what the bees say if the Player Characters wish to speak to them. They know the following:

- They have seen what is going to happen. A bright sun and a black sun meet. This ends everything. It is coming in less than a day. There is no time to stop it.
- Nobody believes the bees. The bees tell and tell but none listen to them. The bees despair.
- The destruction begins in the Spider Nation. The great spiders are leaving this world. They are going to a new home where they will be revered as gods.
- The spiders have done a terrible thing. They are accursed for ever.

Location: The Spider Nation

If the Player Characters are to reach the heart of this mystery, they must go to the Spider Nation. The driders there are preparing their destruction device in a nameless forest to the south of a distinctive mountain with two jagged peaks (see map).

Reaching the Spider Nation is easy. It is within *teleport* range of the Bee Nation and the Swarm of Ezziunnun can help with targeting.

Bee Pheromones: The Swarm offers to spray the Player Characters with pheromones that will identify them as 'honorary noble bees'. This is the equivalent of making them temporary ambassadors for the Bee Nation. Any spider that encounters them ought to refrain from attacking, assuming the spider vermiurge still honours the treaties between the nations.

This method does work but only for mindless vermin. Spider swarms thus avoid the Player Characters, as do devastation vermin. However, paragon large spiders, driders or the vermiurge do not take any notice of the pheromones, as they know that the Bee Nation is doomed.

The Planar Destruction Array: The Player Characters must somehow locate this device after learning of it from the bees. They can do this by talking to the local plant life, using *contact other plane* or surveying the nations from the air. This last option does not let them see the device, but they do have a chance to witness a *gate* opening to allow black waves of spiders to pour into it. This is a clue that the driders are nearby, helping the nearby spiders to evacuate. Obviously it is impossible to evacuate the whole Spider Nation, but the vermiurge does not much care about that. He and his own favourites are about to become godlike.

The *gate* closes the round after the Player Characters notice it, so it is not possible to tell where it takes the spiders. They can, however, see a greyish-white layer of webbing in the forest close to where the *gate* was.

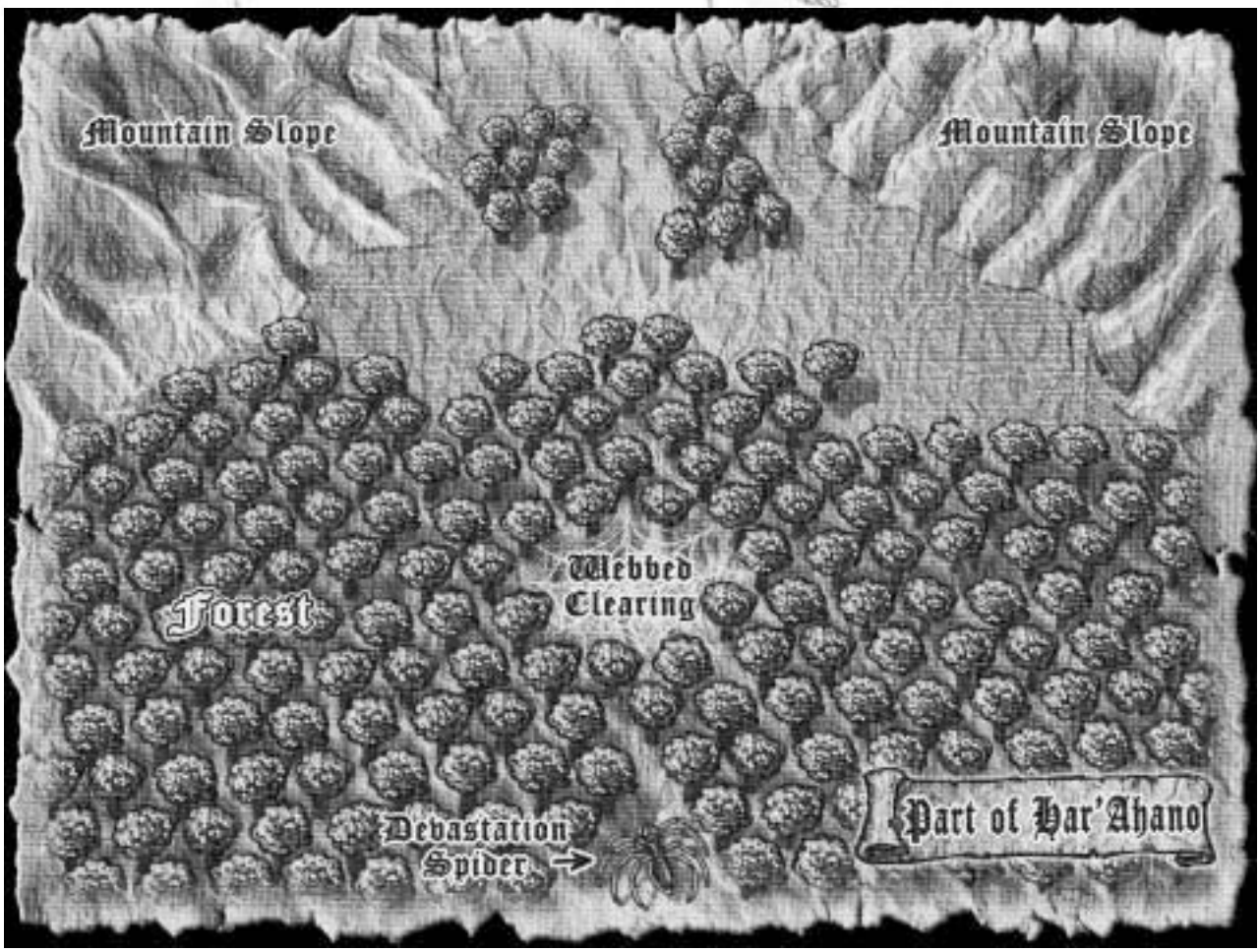
Moving like a shadow across the forest, two or three hundred feet to the south, is a single spider of truly astounding size – a devastation spider.

Location: The Webbed Glade

This clearing in the forest is the heart of the drider operation. The driders have directed a nearby devastation spider to weave a thick canopy of webbing in the glade, concealing the planar destruction device behind a blanket of matted spider web.

The driders are busily casting *gate* spells to evacuate the most important spider families. Unless they have received a warning from a sentry, they have no idea that anyone has learned of their plans. They expect the presence of the devastation spider to scare off any intruders.

This spider is crunching its way through the forest, obeying the instruction from its vermiurge to stay close to the webbed glade. If it notices the Player Characters, it approaches and studies them for a couple of rounds in an uninterested fashion before returning to its wanderings, so long as they have the ambassadorial pheromones. Otherwise it tries to devour them. It also counterattacks if it is itself attacked (for vermiurge statistics see The Swarm of Ezziunnun, page 172). The sound of the spider fighting opponents is obvious to the driders, who ready themselves for a fight.



The Web Layer: The web is clearly visible, with the vague hump of the planar destruction device protruding from the centre. Any creature (other than a spider or drider) wandering into it is stuck as if trapped by a successful web attack from the devastation spider. Attempts to escape or burst the webbing gain a +5 bonus if the trapped creature has something to walk on or grab while pulling free. Each five-foot section has 24 hit points and sheet webs have damage reduction 20/fire. The devastation spider can move across its own sheet web at its climb speed and can determine the exact location of any creature caught in the web.

Devastation Spider: CR 41; Colossal vermin; HD 128d8+1,280; hp 1,856; Init +14; Spd 60 ft., climb 40 ft.; AC 58, touch 16, flat-footed 44; Base Atk +96; Grp +125; Atk +101 melee (18d10+19 plus poison, bite); Full Atk +101 melee (18d10+19 plus poison, bite); Space/Reach 50 ft./40 ft.; SA poison; SQ damage reduction 10/—, darkvision 300 ft., spell resistance 50; AL N; SV Fort +76, Ref +56, Will +42; Str 37, Dex 39, Con 30, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 2.

Skills & Feats: Climb +21, Hide +2, Jump +25, Move Silently +14, Spot +8.

Note: The spider receives a +4 racial bonus on Hide and Spot checks, and gains a +8 competence bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks when using its web.

Poison (Ex): Bite, Fortitude save (DC 94); initial and secondary damage 2d12 temporary Constitution. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Web (Ex): A single web strand is strong enough to support the spider and one creature of Gargantuan size. The spider can cast a web eight times per day. This is similar to an attack with a net but has a maximum range of 150 feet with a range increment of 30 feet and is effective against targets of up to Gargantuan size. The web anchors the target in place, allowing no movement. An entangled creature can escape with a successful Escape Artist check (DC 38) or burst it with a Strength check (DC 44). Both are standard actions.

With a CR of 41, this creature is almost certain to eat the Player Characters for breakfast if they attempt to engage it in combat. They will have more luck if they attempt to avoid it or rely on the pheromones.

Non-Player Character Group: The Drider Emissaries

The drow are breeding a new master race who will be the lords of the new creation once the Dark has destroyed the old one (see Until the Sun Cries Morning). These drow are to be demigods, the result of breeding between the drow goddess She and a chosen male. For this breeding to take place, the drow have to create a bloodline that contains arachnid traits or the union will be sterile. This requires magical crossbreeding between drow and spiders.

The earliest stages of this crossbreeding result in driders: hideous half-drow, half-spider aberrations. These are not, however, treated as outcasts but given special status because of their resemblance to the Goddess. Male driders are trained as fighters or wizards, while females are trained as clerics or, occasionally, given elite special training as blackguards.

When it became obvious that Har'Ahano was the ideal plane to destroy next, the drow realised they would need the help of creatures who already lived there, as it would be next to impossible to get away with anything surreptitious on a plane full of sentient vermin. Any creature, however tiny, might be a spy. The obvious answer was to negotiate with the spiders and who better to act as emissaries than those honoured drow who already resembled them – the driders?

The female driders Galvazz, Melipsene and Lothimana are all clerics of She and are viewed as mortal representatives of the Goddess, more so than the drow clerics, who often resent them for this. They have different spell domains and so have access to different divine spells, but are otherwise identical. Their spell lists are given separately. The male driders Aidahn, Zeredith and Chez'tu are their sworn defenders and inferiors.

Male Drider Ftr16 (3): CR 23; Large aberration; HD 6d8+18 plus 16d10+48; hp 181; Init +3; Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +19; Grp +26; Atk +27 melee (1d6+10/15–20 plus 1 Constitution, *+5 rapier of wounding*) or +22 melee (1d4+3 plus poison, bite) or +24 ranged (1d8+3/x3, *+3 shortbow*); Full Atk +25/+20/+15/+10 melee (1d6+10/15–20 plus 1 Constitution, *+5 rapier of wounding*) and +29/+24 melee (1d4+11/19–20, *+10 dagger*) and +17 melee (1d4+1 plus poison, bite) or +24/+19/+14/+9 ranged (1d8+3/x3, *+3 shortbow*) or +22/+22/+17/+12/+7 ranged (1d8/x3, *+3 shortbow*); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA poison, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., spell resistance 30; AL LE; SV Fort +15, Ref +10, Will +13; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Climb +32, Concentration +9, Hide +11, Intimidate +19, Jump +20, Listen +9, Move Silently +21, Spot +9; Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (rapier), Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Lightning Reflexes, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Rapid Shot, Two-Weapon Fighting, Two-Weapon Rend, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (rapier), Weapon Specialisation (rapier).

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day *–clairaudience/clairvoyance, dancing lights* (DC 13), *darkness, detect good, detect law, detect magic, dispel magic, faerie fire, levitate, suggestion* (DC 16). The caster level is 6th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Spells: The male driders cast spells as a 6th level wizard.

Spells prepared (4/4/4/2, save DC 12 + spell level): 0th *– acid splash, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st *– mage armour, magic missile, shield, true strike;* 2nd *– blur, hideous laughter, levitate, scorching ray;* 3rd *– displacement, lightning bolt.*

Equipment & Treasure: +10 dagger, +5 rapier of wounding, +3 shortbow, arrows (20), *metamagic rod* (Aidahn: *quicken spell*; Zeredith: *maximise spell;* Chez'tu: *empower spell*).

Female Drider Clr16: CR 23; Large aberration; HD 6d8+18 plus 16d8+48; hp 165; Init +7; Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +15; Grp +21; Atk +21 melee (1d6+7/17–20, *+5 keen dagger*) or +17 melee (1d4+2 plus poison, bite) or +18 ranged (1d8+1 plus 3d6 electrical/x3, *+1 shortbow of lightning blast*); Full Atk +19/+14/+9 melee and +19 melee (1d6+2/17–20 and 1d6+1/17-20, *+5 keen daggers*) and +12 melee (1d4+1 plus poison, bite) or +18/+13/+8 ranged (1d8+1 plus 3d6 electrical/x3, *+1 shortbow of lightning blast*); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA poison, rebuke undead, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., spell resistance 33; AL LE; SV Fort +15, Ref +10, Will +19; Str 15, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 19, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Climb +14, Concentration +25, Hide +11, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (religion) +18, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +11, Move Silently +13, Spot +11, Spellcraft +12; Combat Casting, Greater

Spell Penetration, Improved Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Spell Penetration, Two-Weapon Defence, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (bite).

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 16, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Strength. The save DC is Constitution based.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day –*clairaudience/clairvoyance, dancing lights* (DC 13), *darkness, detect good, detect law, detect magic, dispel magic, faerie fire, levitate, suggestion* (DC 16). The caster level is 6th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.
Spells prepared: see below.

Equipment & Treasure: +5 keen dagger (2), *+1 shortbow of lightning blast*, arrows (20); Melipsene only: *staff of transmutation* (15 charges).

Female Drider Domains and Spells Prepared
The female driders cast spells as 22nd level clerics.

Galvazz
Spells prepared (6/6+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/5+1/4+1/4+1/4+1/4 +1, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, guidance, inflict minor wounds, resistance* (2), *virtue;* 1st – *cause fear*, command, entropic shield, inflict light wounds (2), sanctuary, shield of faith;* 2nd – *augury, bear's endurance, bull's strength, death knell*, inflict moderate wounds, sound burst, spiritual weapon;* 3rd – *animate dead*, bestow curse, dispel magic* (2), *invisibility purge, locate object, magic vestment;* 4th – *air walk, dismissal, divine power, freedom of movement, inflict critical wounds** (2), *poison;* 5th – *dispel good, mass inflict light wounds*, plane shift* (2), *slay living, spell resistance;* 6th – *antilife shell, blade barrier, create undead, harm*, word of recall;* 7th – *blasphemy, destruction, disintegrate*, mass inflict serious wounds, repulsion;* 8th – *create greater undead*, earthquake, greater spell immunity, mass inflict critical wounds, unholy aura;* 9th – *energy drain, gate, implosion*, summon monster IX, wail of the banshee*.
*Domain spell.

Domains: Death (touched target dies if it has less than 22d6 hit points, 1/day), Destruction (+4 attack, +22 damage on one attack, 1/day).

Melipsene
Spells prepared (6/6+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/5+1/4+1/4+1/4+ 1/4+1, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th – *bless, cure minor wounds* (2), *resistance* (2), *virtue;* 1st – *cure light wounds* (3), *obscuring mist, protection from good, sanctuary*, shield of faith;* 2nd – *aid, cure moderate wounds* (2), *remove paralysis, shield other*, silence* (2); 3rd – *cure serious wounds* (4), *magic vestment, prayer, protection from energy*;* 4th – *cure critical wounds* (4), *death ward, dimensional anchor, spell immunity*;* 5th – *greater command, mass cure light wounds* (3), *spell resistance*, wall of stone;* 6th – *antimagic field*, greater dispel magic, heroes' feast* (already cast), *mass bull's strength, mass cure moderate wounds;* 7th – *ethereal jaunt, mass cure serious wounds* (2), *repulsion*, spell turning;* 8th – *fire storm, mass cure critical wounds* (2), *protection from spells*, shield of law;* 9th – *mage's disjunction*, mass heal* (2), *miracle, storm of vengeance*.
*Domain spell.

Domains: Magic (can use scrolls, wands, and other devices with spell completion or spell trigger activation as 8th level wizard), Protection (target's next save within the next hour gains a +22 bonus, 1/day).

Lothimana
Spells prepared (6/6+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/5+1/4+1/4+1/4+1/4 +1, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, guidance* (2), *inflict minor wounds, resistance* (2); 1st – *bane, divine favour, doom, entropic shield, inflict light wounds, protection from good*, shield of faith;* 2nd – *bull's strength, darkness, death knell, desecrate*, hold person* (2), *spiritual weapon;* 3rd – *bestow curse* (2), *blindness/deafness, dispel magic, magic circle against good*, magic vestment, protection from energy;* 4th – *divine power*, inflict critical wounds* (4), *sending, unholy blight;* 5th – *dispel chaos, dispel good*, flame strike* (3), *slay living;* 6th – *blade barrier*, harm* (4); 7th – *blasphemy*, mass inflict serious wounds* (2), *power word blind, symbol of weakness;* 8th – *earthquake, fire storm, power word stun, symbol of death, unholy aura*;* 9th – *energy drain, etherealness, implosion* (2), *power word kill**.
*Domain spell.

Domains: Evil (cast evil spells at +1 caster level), War (Weapon Focus (net)).

Overcoming the Encounter: Although the driders can be defeated, this encounter is not designed to be beatable. The driders have an override command word that speeds up the timer, to be used in exactly this kind of situation. Thus the planar destruction device *will* detonate, obliterating the world of Har'Ahano, within fifteen minutes of the Player Characters' arrival.

The Player Characters can at least get a good look at the device, if they can clear the webs away from it:

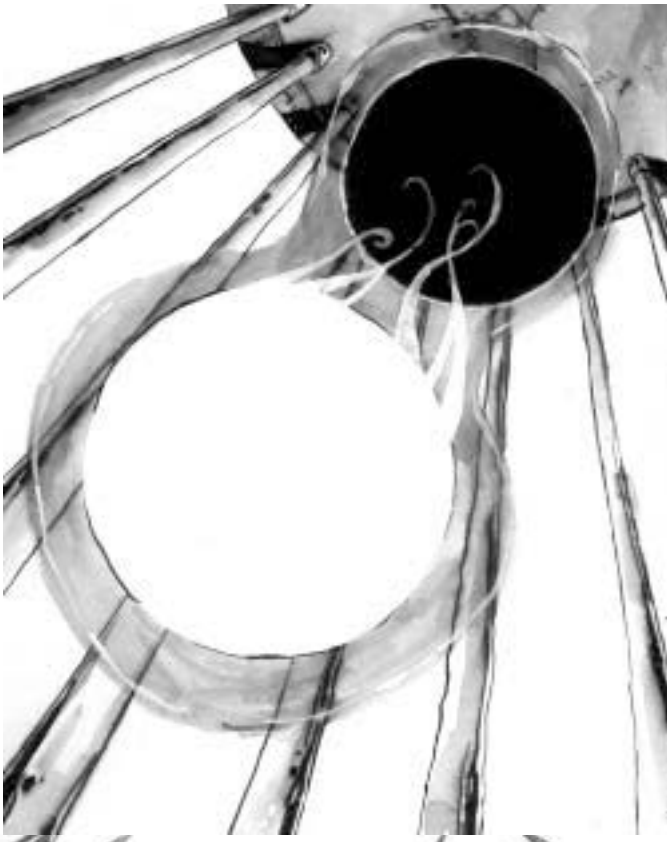
The item beneath the veils of webbing is covered with a further veil, a thick black tarpaulin.

If this is removed, blinding light floods out from beneath it. All creatures within 60 feet must make Reflex saves (DC 40) or be blinded for 2d6 rounds and dazzled for a further 1d6 minutes. Those who make their saves are still dazzled for 1d4 rounds. It is impossible to look directly at the object beneath the tarpaulin without shielding one's eyes, such as with a piece of dark glass.

The thing under the canopy is a cylindrical metal frame, humming and in places sparking with magical energy. You sense immense power here, shimmering in the air like heat. Within the frame are almost invisible magical fields, in a shape like that of an hourglass. In the upper bubble is a sphere of utter blackness, clearly visible against the rays of streaming light coming from the lower chamber, where a brilliant globe as bright as a white magnesium sun is burning.

There is a strange serpentine flow taking place between the two orbs; it looks like purple smoke spiralling in an endless double helix.

The black sphere is identifiable as a *sphere of annihilation* if the Player Characters have the wherewithal to do so. The bright sphere is not something that has been seen before. A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 45) or a research spell such as *vision* recalls certain extremely obscure arcane research that was done into the theory of the *plasmic orb*, the logical opposite of a *sphere of annihilation*. The theory was simple:



since all negatives are balanced by positives, there must be a positive correlate to the *sphere of annihilation* that is as creative as its counterpart is destructive. No epic spellcaster has ever been able to create a *plasmic orb* stable enough to endure the conditions of the Material Plane, though some extremely spectacular explosions have been recorded.

Dismantling the Device: The device has very powerful anti-tampering measures. A Search check (DC 30) made by a rogue or a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 40) reveals that any attempt to move it will almost certainly cause it to detonate. Tampering with it is even more likely to set it off. The device reacts to *antimagic fields*, *dispel* attempts, *mage's disjunctions* and *rods of negation* as 'tampering'.

The Games Master should use discretion here, as the Player Characters can easily annihilate themselves, the plane and the campaign if they are not careful. Only a *wish* spell cast at the instant of detonation, with the intent of undoing the previous action, can prevent this outcome.

A Player Character who is truly determined (or insane) can attempt to deactivate the device with a Use Magic Device check (DC 80). Deactivation here only means that the force bubbles do not merge when the timer runs out. Even when deactivated, the *sphere of annihilation* and *plasmic orb* remain potent.

Rather than deactivating the device, the Players may try to shift it to another plane. Although it would still cause massive destruction, it would not do critical damage to the structure of the Universe, because the plane to which they shifted it would not be one of the crucial ones.

Attempting to move an Array counts as tampering. Whether the attempt is successful or not, the Array detonates immediately as soon as the attempt is made. It is not possible to use *plane shift* to move the Array to another plane, as that spell only works on creatures, not objects. A Player could, however, grab the Array and be *plane shifted* along with it to another plane; this heroic sacrifice would be the end of the Player Character, but would remove the Array safely.

An attempt to use *time stop* to move or destroy the Array without detonating it would not work, as the Array would be 'attended' by the Player in question as soon as it was interacted with, and so would still detonate as soon as it was moved or affected.

The Players may come up with other means to transport the Array off-plane. As an unattended magic item, the Array is entitled to a saving throw against the spell's

effect, which it makes at a +17 bonus. It counts as an artefact for the purpose of *mage's disjunction* spells.

Event: Death of a World

If the Player Characters do not manage to shut down the planar destruction device, the following happens:

There is a sound like that of a stone slab cracking in two. Starting from the webbing's location, brilliant flaming cracks begin to spread out through reality, as if the world of Har'Ahano had been painted on glass that is now shattering in the heat of a furnace. The cracks shear through the matter of the plane, breaking it into loose fragments.

There is a whistling noise which builds to the roar of a gale. Winds stream past at hurricane force. You see enormous creatures flung through the air into the widening rift as if no more than common spiders and beetles.

Sections of the plane measuring miles across split and break away, revealing nothing behind them but fierce light. Larger sections follow. Forests, seas and mountains all seem like mere paintings on a tapestry dragged down by a giant hand.

In less than a minute, the plane of Har'Ahano is gone.

Event: Lord Fnut's Explanation

This event takes place once the Player Characters have brought back information about the destruction of Har'Ahano:

Lord Fnut gestures and an image of a rough, unsteady-looking stone bridge appears.

'This is a visual analogy. The multiverse is a collection of disorderly planes – the blocks – held together by mutual reinforcement and by the mortar of the Astral Plane. One or two blocks might be removed and little harm would be done. But remove too many of the blocks, or one block in a key location, and the whole structure is weakened. First a few blocks would slide out of position, then more, then a critical collapse would begin. I believe that is what we are facing here.

'The planes that have been destroyed were not significant in themselves. Ebbon-Sath, Sakurafu, Arkossa and now Har'Ahano were ordinary, stable worlds, with nothing of magical relevance about them other than their positions. Each was what one might call a keystone. Their removal has placed tremendous stress on the adjoining planes, which have begun to collapse against one another.

'My fellow sentients, we cannot pretend that we are facing some blind destructive force or random planar catastrophe. This is purposeful action; these planes were erased from reality with absolute precision, to a definite end. Whoever did this knows the planes in intimate detail. We had no idea how significant Har'Ahano was until the attack came. Our adversary's knowledge of planar geometries is beyond even that of our allies, the planespiders; possibly beyond even that of the gods!

'I do not wish to cause undue alarm but it is my belief that the entity or entities behind this intends nothing less than the destruction of all *worlds. There is a darkness that encloses the manifest universe, or so say the oldest books of philosophy; and if the cohesion of the planes is broken, they will be pulled apart and dragged down into that darkness.*

Plasmic Orb (Minor Artefact)

A *plasmic orb* is a blindingly bright concentration of positive energy. All creatures within 60 feet who use eyes to see must make Reflex saves (DC 40) or be blinded for 2d6 rounds and dazzled for a further 1d6 minutes. Those who make their saves are still dazzled for 1d4 rounds.

Plasmic orbs constantly arc and crackle with positive energy, which they emit as blasts. Each round, one five-foot square within 60 feet of the *plasmic orb* (selected at random) is hit with a blast of positive energy, dealing 20d6 points of damage to all creatures within that space; a Reflex save (DC 40) is allowed for half damage. Creatures in adjacent spaces are dealt 6d6 points of positive energy damage, with a Reflex save (DC 40) allowed to avoid any damage. Effective caster level is 30th. Undead creatures are dealt double damage from this blast.

A creature can attempt to control the *orb* as if it were a *sphere of annihilation*. A creature who successfully controls the *orb* can direct its positive energy blasts. Alternatively, the sphere's energy can be used to duplicate the effects of a *major creation* spell instead of manifesting as a blast. A creature who harnesses a *plasmic orb* can thus use it to build fortifications, create landscapes or do anything else within the remit of *major creation*.

If a *plasmic orb* comes into contact with a *sphere of annihilation*, the result is a breakdown of reality in that part of the multiverse, causing a region up to a maximum of 50,000 miles across to be shattered completely. This devastation spreads outwards at the rate of 100 miles per round. This is enough to destroy many demiplanes and smaller finite planes.

'Why any intelligent being would want to achieve such an insane goal, I cannot presently say. Were I a pious man, I would say that the Creator is dissatisfied with His work and wishes to start afresh.'

Aftermath

The events at Har'Ahano have confirmed that the drow are somehow involved in the conspiracy to disrupt the balance of the planes. The driders may be a breakaway faction or some hitherto unknown part of the Ennead. The Threnody in Velvet's members have never seen them before and cannot explain their presence.

There are now more questions to be answered. Where were the driders evacuating the spiders to? If the planar destruction devices depend upon *plasmic orbs* and *spheres of annihilation* that are used up in the process, then where are they coming from? Most importantly, where will the enemy strike next?

The attack on Har'Ahano shows that the adversary is much more knowledgeable about the structure of the planes than is any member of the Assembly. It must be using some artefact or similar means to identify flaws in the planar matrix and worsen them. The only way the Assembly can prevent the destruction of the multiverse is to identify which demiplanes are the most vulnerable and reach them before the enemy does. To achieve this, the group must gain godlike insight into the structure of the planes.

One legendary artefact may help here: the Machine of Nonachranon.

The Planar Destruction Device

The method the drow are using is at last revealed. From the description, the Philosophers and other experts can explain how it works.

A *sphere of annihilation* is placed inside one of the receptacles of the device. Into the other is placed a *plasmic orb*, the positive energy equivalent of the *sphere*, created by epic spells known only to the adversary, whoever he, she or it may be. The force bubbles the device generates keep the two globes from touching one another.

At a prearranged time, the force bubbles collapse, bringing the *orb* and *sphere* together. The meeting of the two fundamentally opposed forces creates a shockwave that tears the fabric of the plane asunder, utterly destroying its occupants and leaving nothing but a faint void of negative energy behind, through which shards of matter drift aimlessly.

The Machine of Nonachranon

The hook for this adventure can be presented several ways. If the Games Master wants a conventional arrangement, the Assembly can simply discover references to the Machine in its various tomes and ask the Player Characters to go and find it. Alternatively, if the party is more proactive, they can discover the existence of the Machine if they make inquiries in the right direction and can then persuade the Assembly that it would be a good idea to investigate. Whichever route is taken, the Assembly should learn of it, for the reasons outlined below.

The Planespiders: The planespiders know of the Machine but do not like to speak of it. To them it is an imperfect, corrupt entity best forgotten about. It was meant to do a similar job to theirs, but they disdain it because of the involvement of 'discordant, chaotic influences' in its manufacture.

In truth, as Lord Fnut surmises, the Machine's grasp of planar mechanics is *more* advanced than that of the planespiders precisely *because* it uses chaotic forces in its system. The multiverse contains chaos as well as order, and the planespiders understand only order. The Machine, when it incorporated chaos into itself, became something much more than a machine.

The Factions and the Machine

The factions of the Assembly all want to know what answers the Machine produces. They insist that the Player Characters take some other faction members along to help and allow the rest of the factions to *scry* on them. If the Player Characters interfere with this or refuse, any factions who are indifferent or hostile to them send their own expeditions to the Machine as well.

Information: The Legend of the Machine

The Player Characters can access the following information with a Knowledge (history) check (DC 40) or Bardic Lore check (DC 40). Alternatively, the Games Master can allow them to find it among Thren's books in his chamber within the Skull (see The Crumbling Skull of Space).

The Grey Magi of Gravis Thanta, a plane known for its high concentration of magic, were expert at all forms of magic from Abjuration to Transmutation, but it was in the arts of Divination that they chose to specialise. It was said of them that they could tell the manner of a man's eventual death from the shape of his ear when he was a baby, or the prognosis of a coming battle from the flight of a single gnat in the twilight of the day before. They considered Knowledge to be the most

precious of all things, far beyond Wisdom, Understanding, Compassion, Love or any such nonessentials.

For all their genius, the Grey Magi fell far short of omniscience. Even the most lucid forms of Divination such as contact other plane *amount to asking another being what it believes will happen. This was not the pure knowledge they craved. They had to know everything there was to know or, if not that, then at least more than any other being in the universe.*

The Grey Magi thought that if the universe was, as they believed, fundamentally mechanical, it ought to be possible to build a magical simulacrum of it. By studying that model, they could extrapolate everything that could ever be known.

To this end they created a sub-plane using epic magic and named it Nonachranon. *Within their private plane they built constructs, and those constructs built a tremendous machine using an endless supply of magically generated components. The machine's purpose was to observe, calculate and predict.*

The machine took three thousand years to construct, almost all of which the Grey Magi spent in temporal stasis, *with only occasional awakenings to check that all was running according to plan. The grim iron sentinels that they had set to guard their plane did their work well and nobody interfered with the machine's construction. During the mages' slumber, Gravis Thanta was invaded over five hundred times by lesser civilisations greedy for its magic, and finally settled into a peaceful pastoral economy, the Grey Magi and their wizardry entirely forgotten – not that this troubled the mages one bit.*

At last the day came for the Grey Magi to awaken and activate their Machine, which by now was the size of a small moon. The constructs had obediently built outwards from the Grey Magi's chamber, now the heart of the system. The mages gathered and, with excitement to which they would not admit, spoke the words of activation.

With a sound like an iron giant yawning, the great flywheel began to turn. Pistons rose and fell, glass spheres chimed together in weightless chambers, cylinders of diamond-clear fluid erupted with bubbles and the Machine awoke. It spoke in a crackling voice: 'What would my masters know?'

Alas, we shall never know what the first question of the Grey Magi would have been, for in that moment something dreadful befell them. To the horror of those privileged few who were scrying *the event by long-standing invitation, three thousand years of aging seized each mage in an instant. Eyes fell in, skin sloughed off like old wallpaper and ancient bones fell rattling to the ground.*

Mages still argue over the cause of this. Some believe it was a flaw in the temporal stasis, *while others believe that an outraged group of outsiders caused it, determined to punish the Grey Magi for their presumption to knowledge beyond that which mortals should be allowed. The most common belief, however, is that the Machine itself destroyed its masters, having achieved sentience during the long process of its construction.*

Sometimes a group of young wizards made brave by drink proposes a trip to Nonachranon to investigate; but when the time comes to depart, everyone who said they would go always seems to have a potion to check on, a homunculus to feed or some other commitment out of which they simply cannot get.

Accessing Nonachranon

The Player Characters can access Nonachranon by means of a *gate* or *plane shift*. Neither allows them to travel directly to the Machine's heart. The Machine has the same prerogative as a deity, in that it can prevent creatures from entering its central regions. The Grey Magi gave it this power in order to prevent sabotage by jealous or hostile forces.

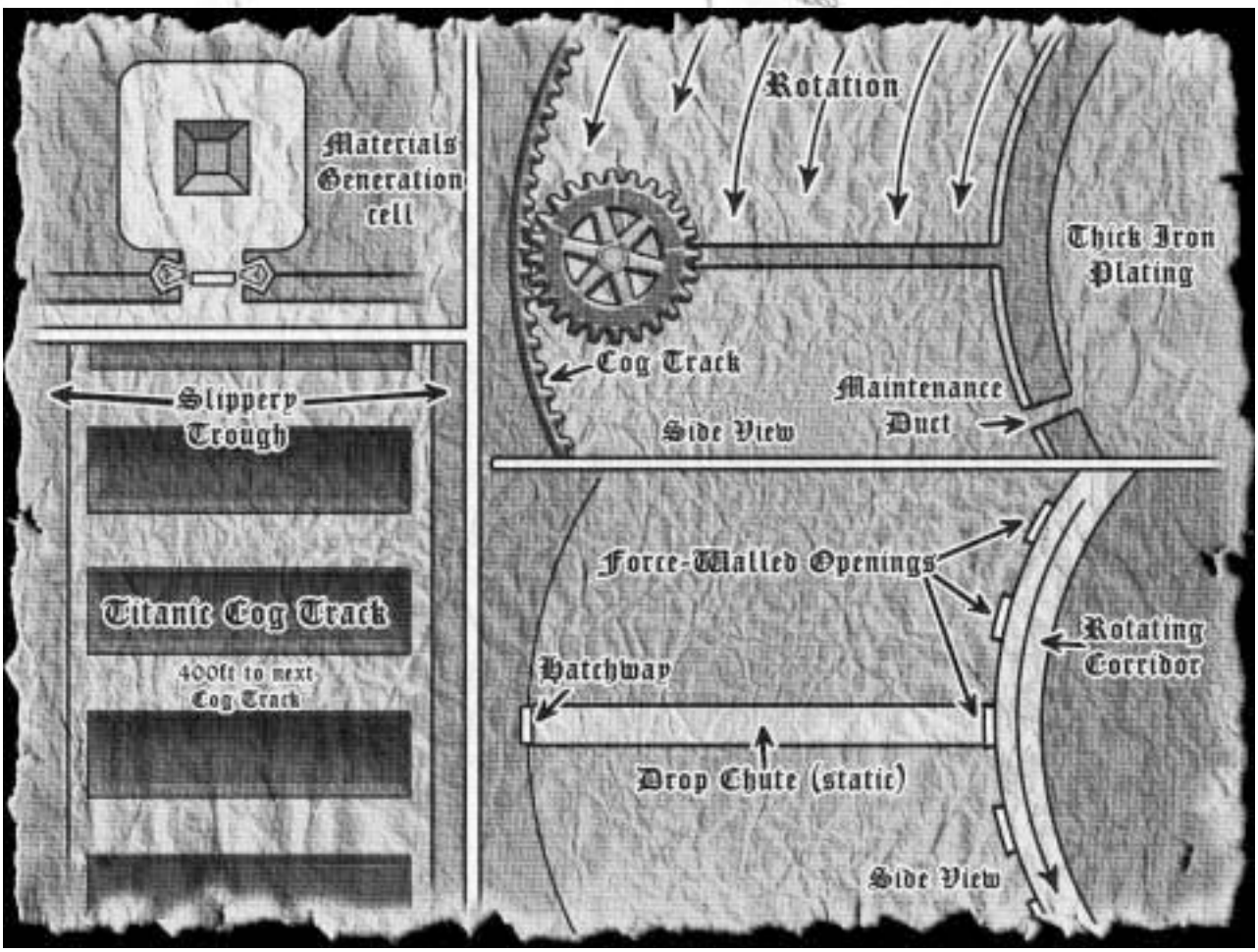
The closest the Player Characters can come to the core is the Security Layer, which lies between the Casing and the Orrery. From here they have to work inwards until they reach the Core.

Planar Traits

Nonachranon has the following traits:

- Sentient. The Machine comprises almost the entirety of the plane and is a conscious being with a mind like that of a deity. It is, however, still a construct. It does not break the rules by which it was manufactured. It can therefore move parts of itself (opening or closing a door, for example), but it does not reshape itself (so the door will not melt, fade away or change into anything else).

- Subjective directional gravity. The non-flying constructs can fall through the air as a shortcut if they choose but have been programmed to walk on the Machine's surfaces as much as possible to minimise damage. If a construct needs to climb a wall, it walks along the floor and then walks up the wall at right angles to its former direction.



Inside the Machine

The air inside the Machine smells of electrical discharge, like the aftermath of a lightning bolt, with the mineral smell of black oil underneath.

The interior of the Machine is a jarring amalgam of magic and engineering. The light is variously crimson, silver and iron-coloured, like the inside of a furnace. The walls are made from metal panels held in place by rivets, each bearing a tiny rune. The corridors have iron arches at ten-foot intervals with magical script embossed into them. Steel hands that emerge from the walls hold torches that flicker with continual flame. The echoes of clanging footsteps resound through the place as the constructs go about their work.

The Machine is too vast to map. Instead, some typical sections are included. The Player Characters only need to know which sections they can access from where. The sections described are those in which something potentially interesting can be found. Otherwise, the Games Master should assume the Player Characters are moving through seemingly endless metal corridors.

Walls and Doors in the Machine

All of the walls in the Machine are made from metal. Some are made from iron, with the remainder being mithral or adamantine according to the importance of the area. A note after each location title gives the metal of which it is made. Doors are made from the same metal as the walls into which they are set.

The doors have complicated mechanical locks which resemble circular grooves six inches across into which multiple holes have been bored they can be opened with an Open Lock check (DC 60). There are no keys to these locks other than on the remains of the Grey Magi. Instead the constructs have been fitted with metal key-like protrusions in their fingers that fit into the locks and unlock the doors when necessary. As the construct must manipulate these protrusions to unlock a door (rather than just turning them), it is not possible to use a destroyed construct's limb as a key. However, careful study of the protrusions confers a +2 circumstance bonus on an Open Lock check to unlock a door.

Reaching the Core

There are two ways in which a character can reach the Core from the Security Layer. The Player Characters can either follow the corridors and catwalks that the constructs use and risk having to fight through them, passing through the different layers as they go, or they can enter the machinery zones beyond the walls and avoid the constructs, though if they do this they risk being crushed to death by huge moving metal objects.

Accordingly, two types of chamber have been described: open and mechanical. The Player Characters can switch between these at any point where there is a maintenance hatch or grating. They can also create their own ways in by using magic to cut through the walls.

Non-Player Character Group: The Constructs

There are three grades of construct within the machine, each performing a different duty.

Decimator Engines

The decimator engines (abominations otherwise called the *anaxim*) are the most numerous constructs. Their role is to be the first line of defence. They hover in the Security Layer and in the main corridors, looking for any signs of intrusion. If they encounter any non-construct creature, they descend upon it and slash it to pieces with their spinning blades.

Decimator Engines (Anaxim): CR 22; Medium construct (extraplanar, lawful); HD 38d10+40; hp 420; Init +7; Spd 60 ft., fly 200 ft. (perfect); AC 37, touch 17, flat-footed 30; Base Atk +28; Grp +40; Atk +43 melee (2d6+12/19–20, spinning blade) or +35 ranged touch (10d6, electrical ray); Full Atk +43 melee (2d6+12/19–20, 2 spinning blades) and +35 melee (2d6+6, 2 slams) and +35 melee touch (2d6+6, shocking touch); or +35 ranged touch (10d6, electrical ray) and +30 ranged (2d6+12, 6 spikes); SA rend 4d6+18, sonic blast, spell-like abilities, *summon iron golem*; SQ abomination traits, construct traits, damage reduction 10/chaotic, epic and adamantine, fast healing 15, magic immunity, spell resistance 34; AL LN; SV Fort +12, Ref +19, Will +17; Str 35, Dex 25, Con —, Int 10, Wis 20, Cha 20.

Note: The decimator engine's spikes have a range increment of 120 ft.

Skills & Feats: Climb +53, Jump +65; Blind-Fight, Cleave, Devastating Critical (blade), Epic Toughness, Epic Weapon Focus (blade), Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (blade), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Overwhelming Critical (blade), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (blade).

Rend (Ex): If the anaxim hits with both spinning blades, it slices particularly well. This attack automatically deals an additional 4d6+18 points of damage.

Sonic Blast (Ex): As a standard action, an anaxim can emit a 60-foot cone of sonic energy that deals 20d6 points of sonic damage to any creatures who fail a Reflex save (DC 29); those that succeed are dealt half damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *displacement* (DC 18), *ethereal jaunt*, *greater dispel magic*, *greater invisibility* (DC 19). The caster level is 22nd and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Iron Golem (Sp): An anaxim can *summon* an iron golem up to four times per day.

Adamantine Golems

The powerful, resilient adamantine golems tend to the heavy machinery, lubricating the mighty gears, winding the clock springs and topping up the reservoirs of acid and water. They are the Machine's maintenance drones.

Although they are every bit as mercilessly lethal with intruders as the decimation engines are, their first priority is the machinery. If the machinery is low on oil, acid or water or does not appear to be running properly, a golem deals with that first and summons one of the decimation engines over to take care of the intruders.

Adamantine Golem: CR 25; Huge construct; HD 54d10+40; hp 337; Init –1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 37, touch 7, flat-footed 37; Base Atk +40; Grp +68; Atk +58 melee (6d10+20, slam); Full Atk +58 melee (6d10+20, 2 slams); Space/Reach 15 ft./15 ft.; SA trample; SQ construct traits, damage reduction 20/epic and adamantine, magic immunity; AL N; SV Fort +18, Ref +17, Will +18; Str 51, Dex 9, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1.

Note: An adamantine golem cannot run.

Skills & Feats: Jump +14.

Magic Immunity (Ex): An adamantine golem is immune to all magical and supernatural effects.

Trample (Ex): As a standard action during its turn each round, an adamantine golem can trample an opponent at least one size category smaller than itself. The trample

deals 8d10+30 points of bludgeoning damage. Trampled opponents can attempt either attacks of opportunity at a -4 penalty or Reflex save (DC 57) for half damage. The save DC is Strength-based.

Mithral Golems
Gleaming and agile, these handsome constructs are built like Art Deco statues of women with tall headpieces and slender limbs. Their job is to keep the more complicated machinery running smoothly. They are found in the innermost regions of the Machine, adjusting the finest of moving parts, recalibrating the gauges and polishing the lenses.

Mithral Golem: CR 21; Huge construct; HD 36d10+40; HD 238; Init +4; Spd 40 ft.; AC 42, touch 16, flat-footed 33; Base Atk +27; Grp +49; Atk +39 melee (4d10+14, slam); Full Atk +39 melee (4d10+14, 2 slams); Space/ Reach 15 ft./15 ft.; SQ alacrity, construct traits, damage reduction 15/epic and adamantine, magic immunity; AL N; SV Fort +12, Ref +16, Will +12; Str 39, Dex 19, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1.

Skills & Feats: Jump +18.

Non-Player Character Group: The Skirrith

The strange metallic clusters called the skirrith are the 'antibodies' for the inner section of the Machine. They are aberrations rather than constructs, representing the successful generation of organic life from a fusion of living tissue and metal.

The skirrith patrol the interior section, occasionally assisting the mithral golems in their work and continually watching for intruders. They were originally intended to capture trespassers within their bodies (in their armoured sphere forms) and bring them before the Grey Magi for questioning. Now that their masters are dead, they are more likely to strike to kill.

The skirrith are detailed in Appendix III: New Monsters.

Security Layer (Mithral, Open)

You are inside a vast metal structure, probably the most gigantic artificial object you have ever seen. The air is smoky, with a chemical taste that burns your throat. Ahead and to your right, a single metal girder hundreds of feet across looms over you, its summit lost in the darkness above. Glinting shapes that look as tiny as gnats move to and fro in the distance. Beneath your feet the floor is an endless succession of hexagonal metal plates around six feet across, the colour of polished silver. Every thirty feet a cluster of these hexagons is made from glass instead of metal and you can see orange firelight blazing below, sending up a hellish glare like a spotlight through the smoke. From all around comes the rhythmic rumble and grind, rumble and grind of great cogs moving.

The glassy hexagons are nothing but light sources. The girder can be climbed easily; all it does is support the outer casing and give the decimation engines something to perch on.

Security Patrol: A wing of 1d4+4 decimation engines passes close to the Player Characters' location every two minutes. They are looking for any evidence of intrusion; even something as trivial as a hatch wheel in the wrong position gets their attention.

Hatchway: If the Player Characters search around for a few rounds (no search check needed), they can find an access point to the next layer of the Machine. This is a raised podium two feet high, made from a cluster of seven hexagons, much like the lighting area above. The central hexagon has a slim metal staff protruding from it. It responds to a set of command phrases; a member of the Grey Magi could use this to activate the podium and slowly descend to the next layer. Unless the Player Characters have some ingenious means of finding out what these words were, they are stuck with making a Use Magic Device check (DC 30) to activate it blindly.

The hatchway has been fitted with an anti-tampering magic trap to catch unwary intruders. The trap has a noisy sonic component; if it goes off, it attracts the attention of a patrol of decimation engines.

Electrical Explosion Trap: CR 18; Search DC 35, Disable Device DC 35; effect 30d6 each of electrical and sonic damage dealt to all targets within a 40-ft. radius spread; Reflex save (DC 28) for half damage.

Maintenance Hatch: A more thorough search of the area using a Search check (DC 20) finds a maintenance hatch into the machinery region. This is a hexagon cluster with a wheel set in the centre. The wheel's hub is fitted with one of the elaborate mechanical locks (see Walls and Doors in the Machine), which the decimation engines can unlock if necessary. It opens onto the Slippery Troughs section below.

Breaking through the Walls: If the walls are broken through, the Player Characters end up in the Titanic Cog Tracks and Slippery Troughs sections below. The Games Master can roll randomly to see if they enter a cog track or a trough (40% chance of the former).

The Outer Casing: If the Player Characters are thorough enough in their searching to examine the outer casing, they find an open doorway into a materials generation cell (see below).

Materials Generation Cell (Iron)

This chamber looks as if it has been bolted temporarily into place. Removable fixtures hold the doorway on, as if the whole room is modular, ready to be detached and moved to another part of the Machine.

The mechanical array here is clearly used frequently. Metal feet have scuffed the walkway underneath with hundreds of years of marks. The central feature of the room is a truncated pyramid made from black adamantine with softly glowing runes inscribed on panels around the base. There are two rather ordinary-looking handcarts beside it, contrasting sharply with this display of magic.

The materials generation cells are indeed modular. As construction proceeded, the constructs were able to move them outwards from the Core, bringing this source of supplies to wherever it was needed next.

A character who attempts a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 30) immediately surmises that there is something missing from this arrangement. There ought to be an additional component on top of the truncated pyramid. A further Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 40) reveals that the missing component should probably be a containment field of some kind. The runes on the panels can be read with a Decipher Script check (DC 40); they translate as *oil, acid, water, girder, panel, rivets, tools, fixtures* and *body parts.* Although the runes are still alight, there is no way to make the device function.

A Search check (DC 40) finds a telltale clue: a few long, wispy silver hairs caught in the iron doorframe. This needs no skill check to explain. The drow have been here.

This area was used to generate the materials needed to build the Machine during the construction phase. Until recently it was used to produce stores of oil, acid, pure water and other necessary supplies for the adamantine golems. However, the *plasmic orb* that was integral to the process has been stolen; the drow took it to use in one of their planar destruction devices. This will eventually lead to the Machine breaking down, but the drow do not care. It will soon have served its purpose.

Titanic Cog Tracks (Iron, Machinery)

You have emerged into a metal gully forty feet wide, with thirty-foot-high iron sides that look as smooth as glass. The floor has raised blocky ridges five feet high at thirty-foot intervals, as if intended for a huge cogwheel to slot into.

That, you now see, is exactly what it is for. Several gigantic armatures slowly move through the air, each with one end attached to the far wall and the other ending in a wheel slotted into one of the gullies. You realise that the entire inner section of the Machine is rotating inside *the outer section.*

Ahead, a rolling iron wall bears down on you. You guess that it will reach your area in less than half a minute. If you do not move out of the cog's path quickly, it will crush you.

A cog passes this way every two minutes, and will reach the Player Characters' location in four rounds. Any creature in its path is dealt 40d6 points of bludgeoning damage and is pinned as if by a Strength score of 80; a Reflex save (DC 50) is allowed for half damage, and creatures who make their saving throws are not pinned. A pinned creature is dealt crushing damage for three more rounds, after which the cog moves on.

The iron walls of the gully are completely smooth and slippery with lubricating oil; an extremely difficult Climb check (DC 75) is needed to scale them.

A smaller group of decimation engine patrols (1d4+1 engines to a patrol) hovers in this area, while solitary adamantine golems walk up and down each armature. If any of the cogs makes noises that it should not, they summon an additional adamantine golem from the next layer to come and investigate.

Slippery Troughs (Iron, Machinery)

You are in a broad concave valley between iron-walled channels where immense wheels trundle. The metal of the walls glistens with rainbow smears of oil.

Any creature trying to balance on these troughs (even a golem) must make a Balance check (DC 20) each round or fall prone. A character who imagines 'down' in such a way that the trough becomes a ramp rather than a level surface can slide along it at a speed of his choice up to 130 feet per round, at which point he begins to fall.

Force-Walled Openings

The long adamantine column reaches from the outer casing to a set of rail tracks on the inner casing. Between these tracks, at intervals of around one thousand feet, are twenty-foot-square openings into a torchlit corridor which seems to be adamantine-plated and fitted with red carpets on all three of its walls.

The openings are blocked with *walls of force* (caster level 30th). See the Rotating Corridor section below for how this arrangement works.

Thick Iron Plating

The surface of the inner casing, like the surface opposite it, is made from iron. The casing itself is two hundred feet thick – a rust monster's idea of paradise.

Maintenance Ducts: Fifteen-foot-wide tubes pierce the plating, allowing adamantine golems to move from this section to the Calculation Grid (see below). Each end of the tube has a locked iron door closing it off. Player Characters who are avoiding the main corridors must use these ducts to bypass the transport carriage route.

Drop Chute (Adamantine, Open)

This passageway, or shaft, or chimney – it is hard to know what to call it in a realm without constant gravity – vanishes into the far distance. At the very end you think you can see a rotating wall.

The rotating wall is the inner sphere, scrolling past the end of the fixed chute. At the midpoint of the chute, a mithral golem stands to attention, ready to welcome official visitors to the Machine. It attempts to stop the Player Characters as they move past and asks to see their invitations. If they cannot provide any (it is programmed to look for the *arcane mark* of the Grey Magi), it escorts them back to the Security Layer, calling for help from the decimation engines if it is attacked.

Rotating Corridor (Adamantine, Open)

The chute ends at a wall of moving metal scrolling steadily past. An opening comes into view with a corridor beyond, then is gone again.

If the Player Characters continue to watch, another opening passes by. These are the force-walled openings (see above). The force wall in front of each is temporarily deactivated as the chute moves past, allowing visitors to walk from the chute into the corridor.

Transport Carriage (Adamantine, Open)

This carriage-like contraption is fixed to cables that run along the wall. It is fitted with carved wooden handrails with stylised dragon heads on the ends. There are wheels on either side like those on a ship's helm, to wind the carriage along. Two adamantine golems stand in silence, looking expressionlessly at you.

The golems wait for the Player Characters to ask to go down. Unlike the other constructs, they do not automatically recognise intruders as such. Their assumption is that the mithral golem in the drop chute has dealt with any unauthorised persons. On command, they lower the carriage. They also stop at any observation pod if requested but do not stop between pods.

Observation Pod (Adamantine, Open)

The passageway widens out into a spherical chamber. The walls are made from adamantine girders in a hexagonal grid, with panes of some glass-like substance in between. The cables from which the carriage hangs stretch across to the other side of the room.

Through the clear windows you can see the inside of the Machine for miles in all directions. It is awe-inspiring and more than a little terrifying; a honeycomb of iron struts crawling with movement and simmering with magical lights.

Prisms hanging in key cells receive beams of gleaming information from pulsing metal needles and project them onto nearby screens as row upon row of runes, flying by too fast to see. Golden objects move through the matrix, throbbing steadily, turning into each of the geometric solids in turn, like some sort of dimensional metronome regulating the chaos.

A cluster of iron faces hovers close to the window, all its mouths babbling in an unknown tongue, before zooming away out of sight. Through the netlike grid, in the far distance, you see the spheres of a gargantuan planetarium rise and fall like a surfacing sea monster.

The glass-like substance is mithral, magically rendered transparent at great expense. The purpose of this room is to show off the workings of the Machine to guests of the Grey Magi. There are ten of these pods on the way to the inner section.

The shaft ends in a magically treated adamantine door, the gateway to the inner section of the Machine. The adamantine golems simply stop the carriage at the end of the shaft. If this were an official tour, one of the Grey Magi would meet the Player Characters here and take them through.

Maintenance Hatch (Adamantine, Open/Machinery)
In the side of the shaft is a sturdy square hatch fifteen feet across.

This locked hatch allows access to the Calculation Grid.

Calculation Grid (Machinery)

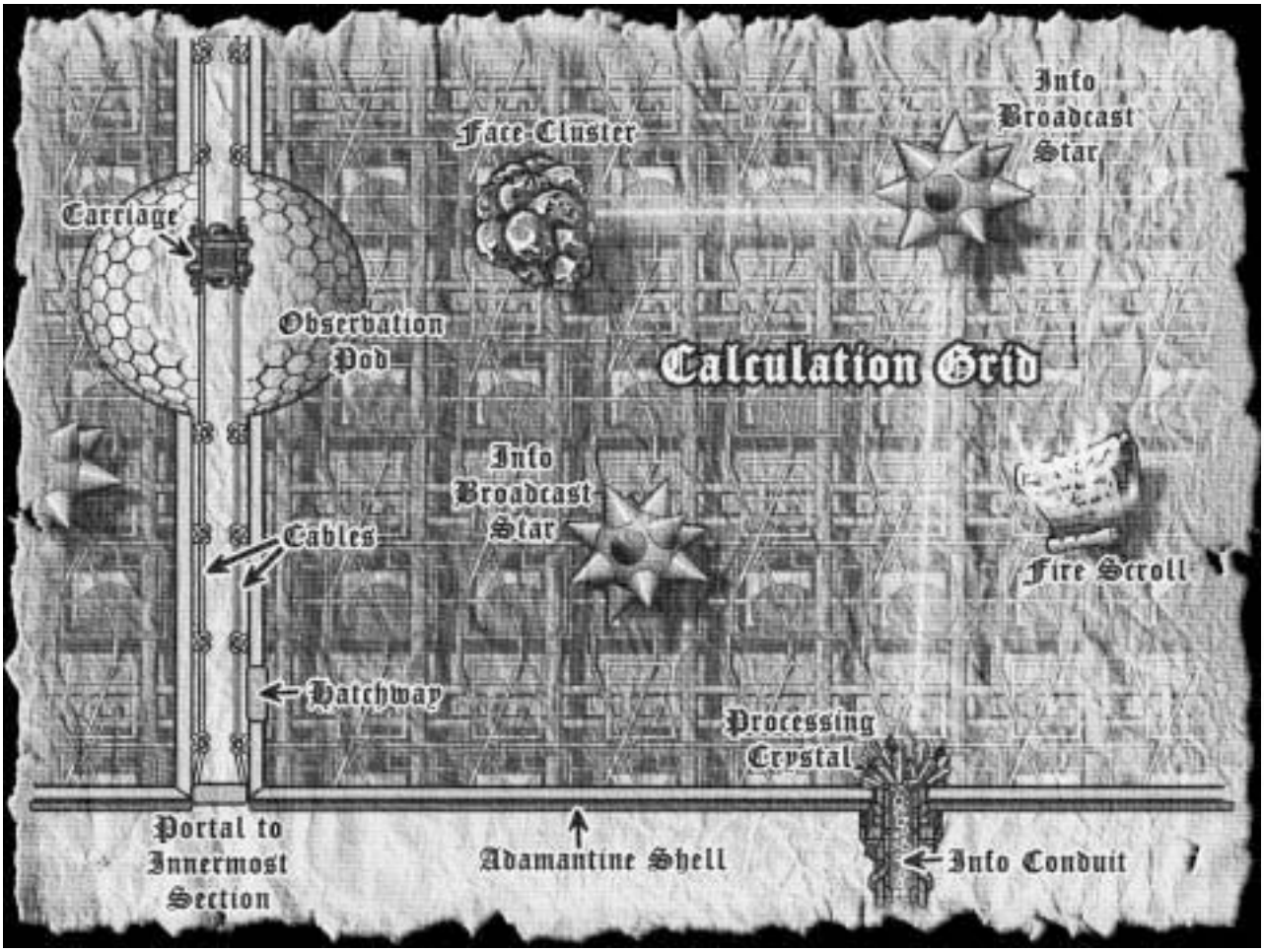
This is the indescribably vast and complex region that the Player Characters can see through the window of the observation pod. It makes up the majority of the Machine's internal space.

Here magical and mechanical animated objects go about calculating all the various probabilities in the universe and feeding that information into the inner section, where artificial brain constructs think it over and produce their predictions.

The Player Characters can climb into this part of the Machine from the carriage shaft or from a maintenance tube through the thick iron inner casing (see above). Movement through the Calculation Grid is fast (as one can simply free-fall) but hazardous, as there are iron girders, beams of concentrated information, flying constructs and other obstacles in the way.

The following are some of the hazards and features of the Calculation Grid. The descriptions given here are not exhaustive. The Games Master can let his imagination run wild.

Prism Rune Array: These configurations are found close to the outer walls. Ten-foot-high tetrahedral prisms with disquietingly human-like transparent eyes in the centre hover alongside concave silver mirrors which have images racing across them. These mirrors use some advanced form of *scrying* to survey the universe in broad sweeps. The images pass across the mirrors far too quickly to see. After a minute of this, an iron face cluster (see below) comes and snatches the prism up, takes it to an information broadcast star (see below) and drops it into the top for a second, then brings it back to its mirror.



Iron Face Cluster: These constructs resemble bunches of iron grapes with a face on each grape. Their job seems to be to move prisms around and occasionally hover in front of fire scrolls (see below). The faces constantly babble so loudly that any non-construct creature within 30 feet must make a Fortitude save(DC 30) or suffer *deafness* as per the spell (caster level 30th). A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 50) establishes that this babbling is a purgative process. The faces are, so to speak, burning off surplus information and discharging it as nonsense, much as a factory discharges smoke.

Information Broadcast Star: From its various sources such as the prism rune arrays and iron face clusters, the Calculation Grid feeds raw information to the information broadcast stars. These collate the information and convert it into psionic rays, which they send to processing crystals to be broken down into categories.

The information beams are broadcast from clusters of spikes that hang in the air like iron stars. A creature with Intelligence of more than 6 who comes within 800 feet of one of these stars interferes with its operation, as it mistakes the creature for a processing crystal and attempts to beam the information into it. Only mindless constructs are allowed in the Calculation Grid for exactly this reason.

A creature targeted by a broadcast star is the target of a beam five feet wide and up to 1,000 feet long. Any creature in the path of the beam must make a Will save (DC 40) or be flooded with a psionic wave of disconnected information, a mental experience akin to being forced to read a thousand unrelated pages of text in a split second. Those who fail their saves suffer from *insanity* as per the spell (caster level 30th). Those who make their saves suffer from *confusion* for 1d6 rounds but may add a +1 insight bonus to any Intelligence-based skill checks they make for a week after receiving the information blast, as the information lingers in the subconscious and can provide useful titbits. A creature who subjects itself to repeated beams in the hope of capitalising on this can accumulate a maximum total bonus of +5 to such checks.

Fire Scroll: This is a moving scroll thirty feet high, winding from one spool to the other, with runes appearing across it in fiery letters like something out of an apocalyptic vision. It is fixed in place on the inner region of the Calculation Grid. Occasionally a brilliant and focused ray lances out of an information broadcast star and traces a new rune on the scroll.

A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 40) or Knowledge (religion) check (DC 40) deduces the following: the scroll's purpose seems to be to act as a repository for information that is magical or divine and thus too potent to be stored in a processing crystal.

If the Games Master wishes to allow random effects to alter characters in permanent and significant ways, a character who reads the runes on the scroll and uses *read magic* to understand them has a flat 50% chance to gain a permanent inherent bonus to Wisdom, Charisma or Intelligence of 1d3 points, and an equal chance to be immolated on the spot, burnt to a crisp by the sheer intensity of the revelation; a Will save (DC 45) resists this effect, which has an effective CL of 40th.

Disembodied Hand Abacuses: Some of the sections of iron honeycomb have invisible lines of force threading across them, on which are thousands of tiny pebbles in various colours. Spectral hands identical to those produced by a *grasping hand* spell (caster level 30th) flick the pebbles back and forth with blinding speed. They are evidently performing millions of calculations a minute. After ten rounds of this, the hands point a finger and a sizzling ray of binary information flashes into the nearest information broadcast star.

Processing Crystal: These are outcrops of aquamarine crystal thirty feet across situated on the adamantine shell (see below), lit from within by the glow of information racing through them. The broadcast stars beam information to them and occasionally a flaming scroll discharges a flurry of runes into them. Each processing crystal caps an information conduit (see below).

Adamantine Shell (Adamantine, Machinery)

A solid foot of adamantine forms the barrier between the Calculation Grid and the innermost section of the Machine. Unlike the last such layer, there is no maintenance hatch, as mithral golems deal with the work beyond this point. Other than the portal at the bottom of the transport carriage shaft, the only access to the innermost section is through the information conduits.

Information Conduit: These channels relay information in the form of energy from the processing crystals in the Calculation Grid to the construct brains in the innermost section. The channels are a mere foot in diameter, located under the processing crystal. To access them, a creature would have to destroy or somehow move a thirty-foot-wide piece of crystal, then alter its size to fit down the conduit. The conduits feed into the fluid brain tanks (see below).

Portal to the Innermost Section (Adamantine, Open)

This door is emblazoned with a coat-of-arms depicting two intersecting wireframe pyramids surmounted by a crown. It looks to be made of solid adamantine. There is no sign of a lock or key anywhere upon it.

The door is magically treated adamantine. Beyond it is the innermost section of the Machine containing the most delicate components. If the Player Characters try to smash through it, the adamantine golems that work the carriage wheels attempt to stop them (if they are still present). In addition, the four mithral golems on the other side of the portal are alerted by the noise.

The Innermost Section (Open)

The innermost section has no separate regions of machinery. The manufacturers believed that any creature who had made it this far inside the Machine would have to be one of the Grey Magi, a guest or a mithral golem doing its job.

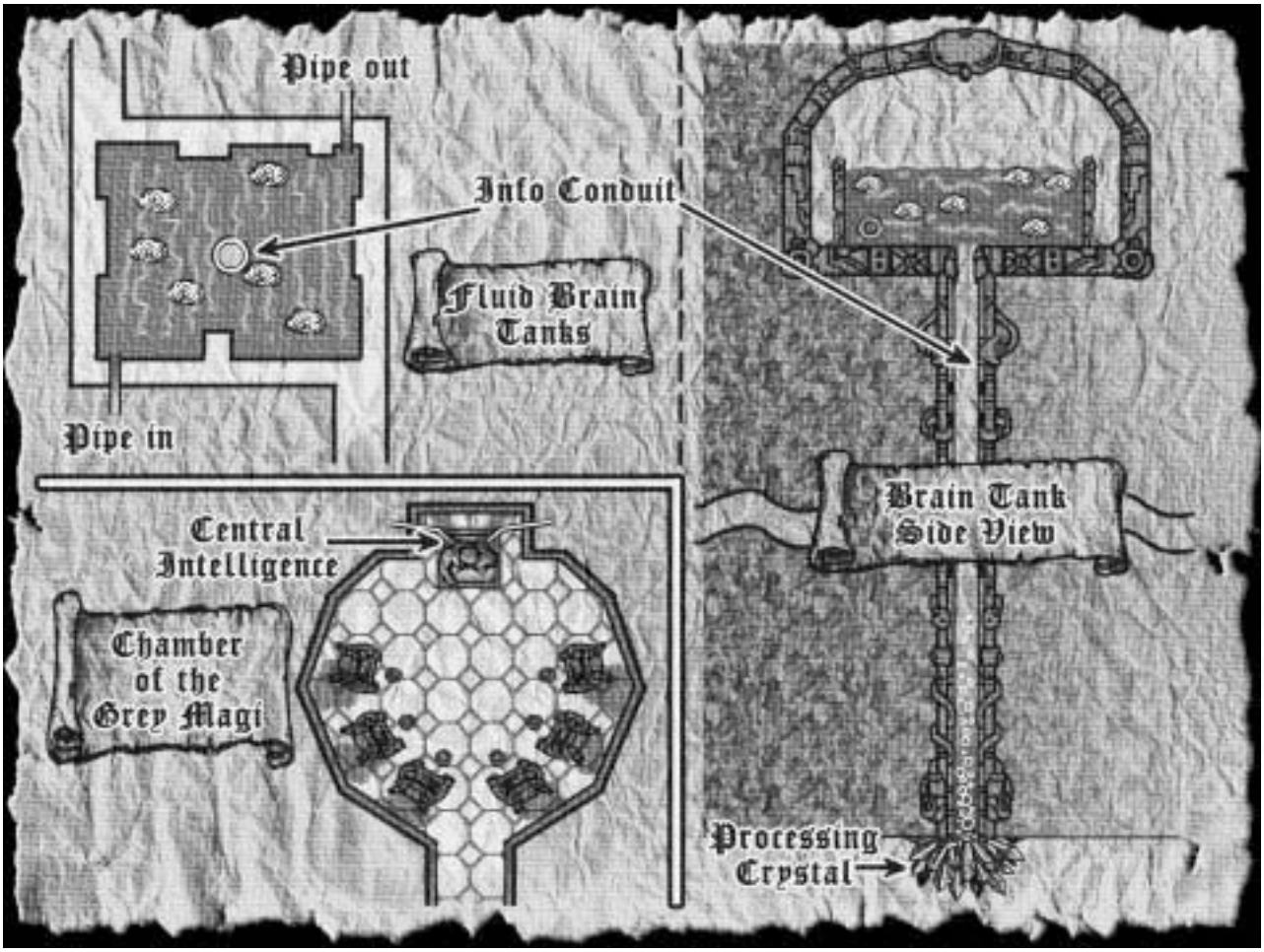
The passageways here are made from mithral. They seem so clean as to be sterile. The noise of machinery is very faint and far away. Only a hum of rarefied electricity can be heard, along with the occasional bright clang of a mithral golem's footfall.

Fluid Brain Tanks (Mithral, Open)

After sixty feet, an information conduit feeds into the clear fluid within these glass tanks from below; the lack of consistent gravity prevents the tank from leaking. Each tank contains six disembodied brains of more than human size floating amid bubbles. The brains have a slight translucency to them, as if made partly from gemstone or glass.

Pipes feed from the walls into each tank and out again, relaying the thought-rich fluid to the Central Intelligence of the Machine.

The mithral golems tend to the brains, cleaning their filters and adding nutrients to the fluid. A troubled brain sends out a telepathic distress call that alerts all golems in the area (typically 1d4+2 of them).



Chamber of the Grey Magi

The ceiling of this domed room features a spectacular painted red rose with a crystalline drop of dew on one of the petals in which stars and galaxies are reflected. Beneath are six high-backed thrones on which slump dusty skeletons. There are engraved circles six inches across on the floor in front of the skeletons' feet. Two more skeletons, the remains of black robes still loose on their bones, lie in the centre of the room.

In an alcove facing the thrones is an androgynous figure in a declamatory posture like that of an orator about to address a crowd. The figure, like the walls and floor, is made from polished mithral. As you watch, it blinks.

The skeletons are the remains of the Grey Magi; the marble figure is the Central Intelligence, the mouthpiece of the Machine.

The Black-Robed Bones: Anyone examining these remains and making a Search check (DC 20) finds a carved piece of tenebrium in the shape of a spider, the surest sign of a drow cleric.

The Central Intelligence: On noticing living creatures in its presence, the Intelligence asks in a crackling voice, 'What would you know?' The Player Characters can ask it any question they wish and it will answer them. Its knowledge, though immense, is limited to the state of the cosmos as it currently is; it cannot predict the future, nor can it look into the past. It also cannot tell the private thoughts of any being. It could, for example, answer the question 'Where is Bodiless Ao now?' but not 'What does Bodiless Ao want?'

The crucial information the Player Characters need from the Machine is knowledge of which planes are most at risk, who is causing the destruction and where they can be found. The Machine can tell them the following:

- The multiverse could be destabilised further by the destruction of several already-weakened planes. There is, however, only one 'keystone' plane left. If that is destroyed, the destruction will be irreversible. It is the plane of Irilian, one of the aligned planes (neutral evil).

- The planar destruction has been taking place for much longer than the Assembly realises. The drow have been carefully removing key planes for several months.

- The destruction proceeded from those who consulted the Machine before the Player Characters and asked it where they would have to strike if they wanted to cause the collapse of the whole multiverse. Two of those who consulted it are now upon the floor, dead. The third escaped. They were beings of the drow race.

- The creature who escaped is now on the plane of Irilian.

Limiting the Questions

The awakening of the Central Intelligence alerts the phanes (see below), who drift slowly towards the chamber. The Games Master should have them attack at a suitably dramatic moment, such as right when the Player Characters are about to receive the answer to a crucial question.

If the Player Characters ask too many questions of the Machine, it falls silent and does not continue. Its masters gave it the power to answer other creatures' questions as a demonstration of their own brilliance, not so that others could profit from their creation. The Player Characters should be able to learn the vital scenario information (and perhaps something useful about the other factions) but no more than that.

The Intelligence is connected to the brain tanks by two pipes that feed into its legs through the floor. If these are severed, it can no longer function.

The Temporal Flux Rods

It is obvious to anyone who ponders the Grey Magi's proposition – examining everything in the universe and deducing what will happen next on this basis – that no machine would ever be able to look at the whole cosmos at once, because there simply is not enough time. The Grey Magi knew this and incorporated a temporal flux system into the heart of the Machine. This allows the important components to perform calculation after calculation using the same moment over and over again. The system depends on the six temporal flux rods in this chamber. Each is set into the floor in a mithral casing that must be unlocked and drawn out. Only the circular top of each casing is visible: the circular marks in front of the thrones.

Removing a temporal flux rod causes the whole Machine to shut down. If the proper procedures have not been followed, this brings all nearby mithral golems (fifteen in total) running to the chamber to replace the rod.

Footprints in the Sands of Time

The true reason for the sudden dissolution of the Grey Magi was the appearance of a swarm of phanes, evil

outsiders able to draw on fundamental uncertainty and alternate timelines. The Machine threatened the phanes because its precise calculation of the sum tendencies of the universe meant that as soon as it was activated there would only be *one* possible future. By measuring the cosmos, the Machine would define it. This would have blocked the phanes out of the universe altogether, as their powers depend on the intersection of alternate time streams.

Before the Machine could be used, the phanes struck, imprisoning the Grey Magi in their *stasis* fields and leeching time from them so they re-entered linear time as desiccated skeletons. The phanes then subtly altered the Machine so that it could not be used to predict the future with certainty. Despite this, it is still the single most powerful source of knowledge concerning the structure of the universe.

A good way to end this adventure is with the Player Characters frantically trying to ask the right questions of the Central Intelligence while simultaneously trying to fight off the phanes. The phanes despise the Machine and are not willing to allow any creature to benefit from it. If the first group is defeated, more of them arrive in the chamber until the Player Characters have no option but to retreat. If the Player Characters sabotage the Machine so that it can no longer function, the phanes withdraw.

Phane: CR 25; Large outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar, incorporeal); HD 36d8+324; hp 612; Init +11; Spd 80 ft., fly 120 ft. (perfect); AC 50, touch 50, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +36; Grp —; Atk +43 melee (1d6 plus stasis touch, incorporeal touch); Full Atk +43 melee (1d6 plus stasis touch, incorporeal touch); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA chronal blast, spell-like abilities, stasis touch, *summon past time duplicate*, time leech; SQ abomination traits, damage reduction 15/epic, fast healing 15, immunity to sonic, null time field, regeneration 15, spell resistance 37, time regression; AL CE; SV Fort +31, Ref +29, Will +29; Str —, Dex 25, Con 28, Int 24, Wis 16, Cha 33.

Skills & Feats: Balance +46, Concentration +48, Diplomacy +50, Hide +42, Jump +20, Knowledge (arcana) +46, Knowledge (religion) +46, Knowledge (the planes) +46, Listen +44, Move Silently +46, Search +46, Sense Motive +42, Spellcraft +46, Spot +44, Swim +39, Tumble +46; Alertness, Blinding Speed, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Epic Toughness (2), Epic Will, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Spell Stowaway (*time stop*), Weapon Focus (incorporeal touch).

Note: A phane's natural weapons are treated as epic, evil and chaotic-aligned for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Abomination Traits: blindsight 500 ft.; immune to mind-affecting effects; immune to *polymorphing*, petrification and other form-altering attacks; nondetection; not subject to energy drain, ability drain, ability damage or death from massive damage; resistance to cold 20; resistance to fire 20; telepathy out to 1,000 ft.; true seeing at will.

Chronal Blast (Su): As a standard action, a phane can make a ranged touch attack against any creature within 100 feet. If it succeeds, the subject is targeted by a spasm of space-time flux which deals 15d6 points of damage.

Null Time Field (Ex): Phanes continually generate a 30-foot-radius spread null time field. Every creature and object in the field except the phane must make a Will save (DC 30) each round to take any actions. On a failed save, the subject is stuck in a static time stream until its next round of actions, at which time it must make another save. While a subject is stuck in a static time stream induced by a null time field, the phane can use its static touch on the subject, though in all other ways the subject is invulnerable to attacks and damage as if in *temporal stasis*.

Regeneration (Ex): Phanes take normal damage from holy and good weapons and from the temporal flux rods in the Chamber of the Grey Magi.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *detect good*, *detect magic*, *improved invisibility* (self only); 5/day – *greater teleport* (DC 28), *haste*, *slow* (DC 24), *tongues*, *trap the soul* (DC 29), *true strike*, *unholy aura* (DC 29); 2/day– *safe time* (epic spell), *time duplicate* (epic spell); 1/day – *time stop*. Caster level is 21st and save DCs are Charisma-based.

Stasis Touch (Su): As *temporal stasis* except as an at-will supernatural ability. Caster level is 25th; save DC is 29 and Charisma-based.

Summon Past Time Duplicate (Sp): Once per day, a phane can summon a duplicate of one its foes stolen from a parallel alternate past. The stolen *time duplicate* has the same statistics and possessions as the original but is treated as having two negative levels. The phane can never summon a past *time duplicate* of a creature with more than 25 Hit Dice; the Games Master should add sufficient negative levels to compensate for high foe Hit Dice if necessary. The past *time duplicate*, despite having

most of the knowledge of the original, serves the phane loyally like any *summoned* creature. If the past *time duplicate* is slain the original is not harmed, because the duplicate was pulled from a parallel past. However, the original does not necessarily realise this and must make a Will save (DC 30) or be shaken for 1d4 rounds after witnessing the death of a duplicate for the first time.

Time Leech (Su): For every round of apparent time experienced by the phane, it automatically absorbs the 'future' from any creature it has successfully encapsulated in static time via its stasis touch (not its null time field), no matter the distance separating victim and phane and no matter the number of victims. For the victim no time passes at all, but each apparent round experienced by the phane ages the victim by 1d4 years, at the same time healing the phane of 20 hit points of damage. A victim who is not somehow released from static time by a friend who can cast *dispel magic*, *greater dispel magic* or some other likely spell eventually ages to death. Victims killed in this manner automatically fall out of static time as desiccated husks that disintegrate to a fine dust. Victims who are released prior to death immediately apply the physical effects of aging, but not its mental effects.

Time Regression (Su): If a phane spends an action per round for four rounds, at the end of the fourth round the phane regresses back in time four rounds to the very first round it originally began concentrating on time regression. On its second pass through the time stream it can take completely different actions based on its knowledge of the future (though if it takes different actions from those it took during its first pass through the time stream, the events of the original time stream are also changed).

The phanes are shifting, insubstantial creatures, which move erratically, seeming to move speedily one moment and sluggishly the next. Occasionally, they even appear to be moving *backwards.* Their form is hard to discern and no two are exactly alike. They mostly seem to be a mixture of humanoid and beast, with some favouring the bipedal humanoid form and others so grotesque that it is a mercy they cannot be seen clearly.

Aftermath

If they have asked the right questions, the Player Characters now have all the information they need to save the multiverse. They know that the drow are behind the plot, that there is only one plane left for them to destroy and that the plane is called Irilian.

The Player Characters now have complete freedom to use this information as they please. They can go straight to Irilian and investigate or they can share their information as they were requested. Any faction with which they have good relations will want to come and help investigate Irilian.

Grand Exodus: If the Player Characters allowed themselves to be *scryed* upon as requested, the whole Assembly learns that Irilian is the key plane. Lord Fnut supervises a mass exodus from the Skull to a cavern within Irilian so that the campaign can continue there and every faction can do its part. If this takes place, the cavern chosen for the Assembly's base is ten miles from the main drow complex, accessible by a meandering tunnel that the drow do not often use and are unlikely to investigate.

What Dread Hand

Summary: On the plane of Irilian, the drow plan for their ultimate victory. Irilian is the most critical plane of all, the one whose destruction will cause the final cosmic breakdown to begin, so they have fortified the plane well.

They have prepared an Ebon Egg to bear them through the *Night of Time* – the name they give to the interregnum between the destruction of the old universe and the creation of the new. The Ebon Egg is an artefact based on Myrrik magic (see *The Drow War, Book Two*). It will float unscathed in the darkness while everything else tumbles into ruin. When the Dark establishes its new order, the Egg will open and the new race of drow will emerge into the *Hez'Uril* – the 'world to come' – as the rightful and uncontested lords of Creation.

The Drow Master Plan

When the multiverse is destroyed and replaced by the Hez'Uril, the bodies of the loyal Host will already be gone. Only their souls will survive, bound into soulstones safe within the Ebon Egg, watched over by the goddess She and her faithful lieutenant Arkady, to be reborn as demigods in the new universe.

For the drow to return, suitable bodies must be prepared; a bloodline of creatures, half drow elf and half deity, must be created. A single male chosen for his physical and mental perfection will be prepared to withstand the presence of his Goddess by careful preliminary rituals. Even now he is being groomed for his marriage in Irilian's deep caverns. On the appointed day, the Goddess will descend to the temple in the form of a vast black widow spider. The chosen male will mate with her, until at the culmination she bites off his head and devours his twitching body. She will then return to her home plane, breeding the first of the new race within her.

Attempts have already been made to produce a divine race; each of these has failed because of the imperfection of the father. The botched children of She, a collection of squalid abominations called driders, now walk among the drow and are honoured as sacred beings.

The Player Characters have a perfect opportunity to thwart the drow plan. The mother may be a goddess, but the intended father of the new race is only an ordinary mortal. He can be captured or killed, ruining the work of many years.

The Ebon Egg

The drow fastness contains a critically important artefact, the Ebon Egg. This artefact has been prepared for a journey into the Dark, which is otherwise impossible to reach. When it is time for Irilian to be destroyed, the nine members of the Ennead will load the Egg with soulstones, board it for the last time and travel in it into the Dark to wait out the coming storm.

Naturally such a crucial device has already been tested to ensure that it works. The drow have been using the Ebon Egg to venture from their fortress to the Dark, collect the destruction spheres it emanates and plant them, along with *plasmic orbs* stolen from the Machine of Nonachranon, at the hearts of the dimensions to be annihilated.

At the conclusion of the adventure, the Player Characters have the option to use the Egg themselves to reach the Dark and put an end to the war forever.

The Plane of Irilian

Irilian is earth-dominant. The majority of the plane is made up of solid rock with infrequent tunnels, both natural and artificial, passing through it. This suits the drow very well, as it is reminiscent of their subterranean home beneath the surface of Ashfar.

Reaching Irilian

If the Player Characters act independently they can *gate* or *plane shift* into Irilian, but they must have some idea where they are going or they will end up buried in the earth. Otherwise they can come with the rest of the factions to the cavern when the Assembly relocates there; see the end of the previous chapter for details.

Planar Traits

Irilian has the following traits:

- Strongly evil-aligned. A –2 circumstance penalty applies on all Charisma-based, Intelligence-based and Wisdom-based checks made by creatures not of evil alignment.
- Earth-dominant. Travellers who arrive run the risk of suffocation if they do not reach a cavern or other pocket within the earth. Worse yet, individuals without the ability to burrow are entombed in the earth and must dig themselves out at a rate of five feet per turn. Unless the Player Characters have some way to specify their point of arrival as a cavern, they arrive within the earth.

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Adventuring in the Drow Stronghold

Unlike the usual standard for a dungeon, the drow stronghold has no mandatory arrival point for the Player Characters. This is not a place where they are expected to start at one end and work through the rooms in sequence until they reach a goal; instead they can choose their strategic objectives as they prefer. If the Player Characters want to break straight into the Chamber of Union, they can; they have earned it!

The Games Master must, however, give the foe an even break. The drow do not stay in one place if their stronghold is attacked. They have magical means of surveying the region (*arcane eye*, *prying eyes* and *scrying* are all useful) as well as plenty of sentries and tunnel guards. If the drow are played as an intelligent enemy, this will be a battle to remember for years to come.

This chapter is absolutely packed with enemies. It is not intended to present a balanced challenge, but rather an overwhelming one. This does not mean that the Player Characters are doomed. With stealth, ingenuity and quick thinking, they can achieve their objectives and get out alive. They have their allies in the Assembly, their powers as high-level epic characters and their own wits to fall back on.

Planar Traits

Irilian has the following traits:

- Strongly evil-aligned. A –2 circumstance penalty applies on all Charisma-based, Intelligence-based and Wisdom-based checks made by creatures not of evil alignment.
- Earth-dominant. Travellers who arrive run the risk of suffocation if they do not reach a cavern or other pocket within the earth. Worse yet, individuals without the ability to burrow are entombed in the earth and must dig themselves out at a rate of five feet per turn. Unless the Player Characters have some way to specify their point of arrival as a cavern, they arrive within the earth.

Non-Player Character Group: The Drow

Naturally there are thousands upon thousands of drow here, far too many to give representative statistics for. The great majority are aristocrats and experts, unremarkable members of drow society present only because of their loyalty. Only the higher-ranking drow are likely to engage the Player Characters.

The following are typical drow combatants and driders who serve as stronghold guards.

Veteran Foot Soldier, Drow War10: CR 10; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 10d8; hp 45; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +10; Grp +11; Atk +12 melee (1d10+1/x3, glaive) or +11 melee (1d6+1/18–20, rapier) or +12 ranged (1d10/19–20, heavy crossbow); Full Atk +12/+7 melee (1d10+1/x3, glaive) or +11/+6 melee (1d6+1/18–20, rapier) or +12 ranged (1d10/19–20, heavy crossbow); SA poison, spell-like abilities; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 21; AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Hide +8, Listen +11, Search +11, Spot +11; Dodge, Power Attack, Rapid Reload, Weapon Focus (glaive).

Equipment & Treasure: Chain shirt, crossbow bolts (10), glaive, heavy crossbow, rapier.

Note: When attacking with their glaives, the drow soldiers can attack opponents ten feet away but not adjacent ones.

Although it is unlikely that 10th level warriors will be a challenge for Player Characters who are by now 28th or 29th level themselves, their statistics are provided for completeness' sake. If they engage the Player Characters in combat, they do so in groups of twenty or thirty rather than lining up to be killed one by one.

War-Wizard, Drow Wiz10/Ftr3: CR 14; Medium humanoid (elf); CR 14; HD 10d4+10 plus 3d10+3; hp 54; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +8; Grp +8; Atk +9 melee (1d6/18–20 plus poison, masterwork rapier) or +10 ranged (1d4/19–20 plus poison, hand crossbow), Full Atk +9/+4 melee (1d6/18–20 plus poison, masterwork rapier) or +10 ranged (1d4/19–20 plus poison, hand crossbow); SA poison, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 24; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +9; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 13.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +14, Decipher Script +17, Handle Animal +6, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Knowledge (history) +17, Knowledge (the planes) +17, Ride +6, Spellcraft +17; Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Greater Spell Focus (Evocation), Improved Counterspell, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Scribe Scroll[B], Spell Focus (Abjuration), Spell Focus (Evocation).

Spells prepared (4/5/5/4/4/2, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th *– message, ray of frost, resistance, touch of fatigue*; 1st *– mage armour, magic missile, shield, shocking grasp, true strike;* 2nd *– bull's strength, cat's grace, resist energy, scorching ray* (2)*;* 3rd *– blink, displacement, greater magic weapon, haste;* 4th *– dimensional anchor, fire shield, resilient sphere, wall of fire;* 5th *– cloudkill, cone of cold*.

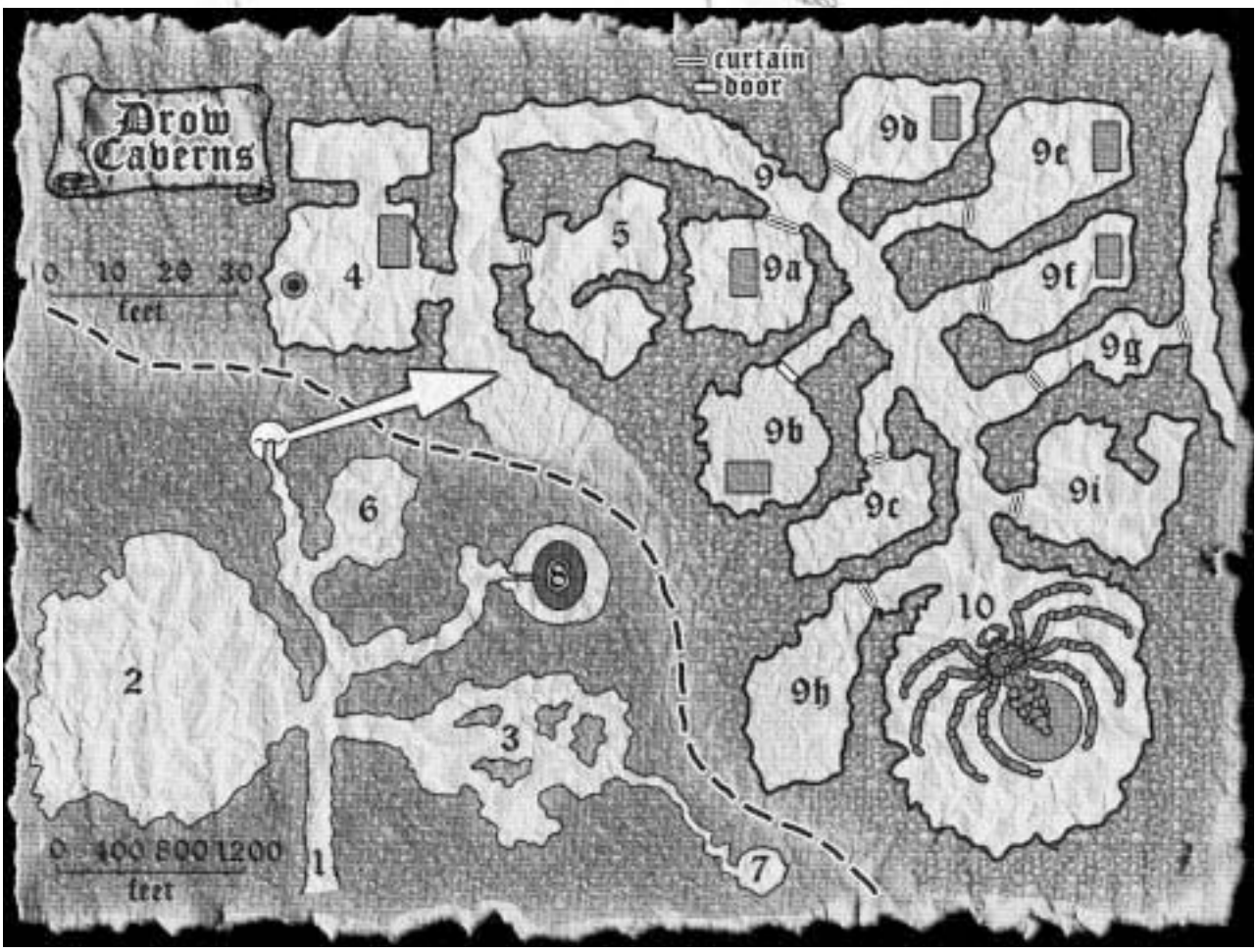
Equipment & Treasure: Crossbow bolts (10), drow blade venom, hand crossbow, masterwork rapier.

Field Commander, Drow Ftr18: CR 19; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 18d10; hp 99; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 25, touch 13, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +18; Grp +22; Atk +25 melee (1d8+6/19–20, *+2 longsword*) or +24 ranged (1d8+6/x3 plus poison, *+2 composite longbow* (+4 Str bonus)); Full Atk +25/+20/+15/+10 melee (1d8+6/19–20, *+2 longsword*) or +24/+19/+14/+9 ranged (1d8+6/x3 plus poison, *+2 composite longbow* (+4 Str bonus)) or +22/+22/+17/+12/+7 ranged (1d8+6/x3 plus poison, *+2 composite longbow* (+4 Str bonus)); SA poison, spell-like abilities; SQ darkvision 120 ft., drow traits, spell resistance 29; AL LE; SV Fort +11, Ref +9, Will +6; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Skills & Feats: Climb +6, Handle Animal +5, Intimidate +15, Jump +6, Listen +12, Ride +8, Search +4, Spot +12, Swim +4; Cleave, Dodge, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Rapid Shot, Shot on the Run, Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialisation (longbow), Weapon Specialisation (longsword).

Equipment & Treasure: +2 composite longbow, +2 heavy steel shield, +3 elven chain +2 longsword, arrows (20), drow blade venom.

Drow Priestess, Female Drow Clr18: CR 19; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 18d8+36; hp 117; Init +6; Spd 20 ft.; AC 23, touch 11, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +13; Grp +13; Atk +14 melee (1d6/18–20, masterwork rapier) or +15 ranged (1d4/19–20, hand crossbow) or +17 ranged (entanglement, masterwork net); Full Atk +14/+9/+4 melee (1d6/18–20,



masterwork rapier) or +15 ranged (1d4/19–20, hand crossbow or +17 ranged (entanglement, masterwork net); SA poison, rebuke undead, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 29; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +8, Will +15; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 19, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +22, Diplomacy +3, Heal +8, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (history) +5, Knowledge (religion) +11, Knowledge (the planes) +3, Spellcraft +13; Greater Spell Focus (Necromancy), Improved Counterspell, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Necromancy), Spell Penetration, Weapon Proficiency (net).

Spells prepared (6/6+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/4+1/4+1/3+1/3+1/2+1, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, guidance, read magic, resistance* (2), *virtue;* 1st – *detect secret doors*, divine favour, doom* (2), *entropic shield, protection from good, shield of faith;* 2nd – *aid, detect thoughts*, eagle's splendour, hold person, owl's wisdom, shatter, zone of truth;* 3rd – *animate dead, bestow curse, clairaudience/clairvoyance*, dispel magic, glyph of warding, magic vestment, prayer;* 4th – *death ward, dimensional anchor, divination*, divine power, lesser planar ally, restoration, spell immunity;* 5th – *disrupt good, greater command, mark of justice, slay living*, symbol of pain;* 6th – *blade barrier, create undead, find the path*, mass bull's strength, symbol of persuasion;* 7th – *destruction*, greater scrying, legend lore, symbol of stunning;* 8th – *antimagic field, create greater undead*, discern location, greater planar ally;* 9th – *gate, storm of vengeance, wail of the banshee**.
*Domain spell.

Domains: Death (touched target dies if it has less than 18d6 hit points, 1/day), Knowledge (all Knowledge skills are class skills).

Equipment & Treasure: +2 full plate armour, arrows (20), hand crossbow, heavy shield, masterwork net, masterwork rapier.

Guardian, Male Drider Ftr16: CR 23; Large aberration; HD 6d8+18 plus 16d10+48; hp 181; Init +3; Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +19; Grp +26; Atk +23 melee (1d6+5/15–20, masterwork rapier) or +22 melee (1d4+3 plus poison, bite) or +22 ranged (1d8/x3, masterwork shortbow); Full Atk +22/+17/+12 melee (1d6+5/15–20, masterwork rapier) and +21/+16 melee (1d4+3/19–20, *+2 dagger*) and +17 melee (1d4+1 plus poison, bite) or +22/+17/+12 ranged (1d8/x3, masterwork shortbow) or +20/+20/+15/+10 ranged (1d8/x3, masterwork shortbow); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA poison, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., spell resistance 30; AL LE; SV Fort +15,

Ref +10, Will +13; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Climb +32, Concentration +9, Hide +11, Intimidate +19, Jump +20, Listen +9, Move Silently +21, Spot +9; Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (rapier), Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Lightning Reflexes, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Rapid Shot, Two-Weapon Fighting, Two-Weapon Rend, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (rapier), Weapon Specialisation (rapier).

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 16, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Strength. The save DC is Constitution based.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day – *clairaudience/clairvoyance, dancing lights* (DC 13), *darkness, detect good, detect law, detect magic, dispel magic, faerie fire, levitate, suggestion* (DC 16). Caster level is 6th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Spells: Casts spells as a 6th level wizard.

Spells prepared (4/4/4/2, save DC 12 + spell level): 0th – *acid splash, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st – *mage armour, magic missile, shield, true strike;* 2nd – *blur, hideous laughter, levitate, scorching ray;* 3rd – *displacement, lightning bolt.*

Equipment & Treasure: +2 dagger, arrows (20),masterwork rapier, masterwork shortbow.

Drider Priestess, Female Drider Clr16: CR 23; Large aberration; HD 6d8+18 plus 16d8+48; hp 165; Init +7; Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +15; Grp +21; Atk +17 melee (1d6+2/19–20, masterwork dagger) or +17 melee (1d4+2 plus poison, bite) or +18 ranged (1d8/x3, masterwork shortbow); Full Atk +15/+10/+5 melee and +15 melee (1d6+2/19–20 and 1d6+1/19-20, masterwork daggers) and +12 melee (1d4+1 plus poison, bite) or +18/+13/+8 ranged (1d8/x3, masterwork shortbow); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA poison, rebuke undead, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., spell resistance 33; AL LE; SV Fort +15, Ref +10, Will +19; Str 15, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 19, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Climb +14, Concentration +25, Hide +11, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (religion) +18, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +11, Move Silently +13, Spot +11, Spellcraft +12; Combat Casting, Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Spell Penetration, Two-Weapon Defence, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (bite).

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 16, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Strength. The save DC is Constitution based.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day – *clairaudience/clairvoyance, dancing lights* (DC 13), *darkness, detect good, detect law, detect magic, dispel magic, faerie fire, levitate, suggestion* (DC 16). Caster level is 6th and the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Spells: Casts spells as a 22nd level cleric.

Spells prepared (6/6+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/5+1/4+1/4+1/4+1/4+1, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, guidance, inflict minor wounds, resistance* (2), *virtue;* 1st – *cause fear*, command, entropic shield, inflict light wounds* (2), *sanctuary, shield of faith;* 2nd – *augury, bear's endurance, bull's strength, death knell*, inflict moderate wounds, sound burst, spiritual weapon;* 3rd – *animate dead*, bestow curse, dispel magic* (2), *invisibility purge, locate object, magic vestment;* 4th – *air walk, dismissal, divine power, freedom of movement, inflict critical wounds** (2), *poison;* 5th – *dispel good, mass inflict light wounds*, plane shift* (2), *slay living, spell resistance;* 6th – *antilife shell, blade barrier, create undead*, harm, word of recall;* 7th – *blasphemy, destruction, disintegrate*, mass inflict serious wounds, repulsion;* 8th – *create greater undead, earthquake*, greater spell immunity, mass inflict critical wounds, unholy aura;* 9th – *energy drain, gate, implosion*, summon monster IX, wail of the banshee.*
*Domain spell.

Domains: Death (touched target dies if it has less than 22d6 hit points, 1/day), Destruction (+4 attack and +22 damage to one attack, 1/day).

Equipment & Treasure: Arrows (20), masterwork daggers (2), masterwork shortbow.

The Reward of the Loyal

The leaders of the Ennead have told their people back on Ashfar that all of the loyal ones among them are assured of a place in the new world. However, they will of course take the most loyal *first*, and it is an unfortunate certainty that many will be left behind to perish along with the humans and other filth. They have hinted that according to prophecy, only the ten thousand most righteous of the whole race will be chosen.

This has resulted in a frantic scramble by lower-ranking drow to prove their own loyalty while exposing others as 'traitors'. Some desperate members of the lowest castes have tried to desert altogether and flee to the upper world, only to be cut down by humans whose memories of the last war are still fresh.

Those who now wait for transfiguration at Irilian refer to themselves as the Ten Thousand Faithful, although there are not yet ten thousand of them. The Ennead has been debating the wisdom of processing the faithful more quickly than it is currently doing. If they rush the process, they will leave themselves without warriors to guard their stronghold, meaning that the possibility exists (however unlikely it may be) for a hostile group to attack and thwart their plans.

1. The Cavern of Arrival

This huge cave is obviously a thoroughfare, as the marks of many footprints cover the floor. At the southern end a wide archway that looks as if it ought to open into a wider cavern instead leads to a recess. Two stern-looking creatures, half drow and half spider, cling to the wall next to the archway.

This is the hallway through which the drow from Ashfar and other honoured guests such as the spiders of Har'Ahano are being brought. The archway to the south is a gate that has been created by a *gate key*. It leads to the central drow city beneath Ashfar. The two guards are drider guardians.

The cities beneath Ashfar are still being evacuated. Every hour a fresh group of arrivals is brought through, shepherded by either a drow general or a drow priestess. The driders watch carefully to make sure no undesirables have snuck into the throng, though with so many people moving past a disguised Player Character can easily slip in among them. The groups are made up of 2d4x10 drow aristocrats and experts; most of the fighting classes have already been evacuated. The leaders show them through into the hall of the Ten Thousand Faithful to the north.

Lord Charrox (see page 206) can often be found here (50% chance) supervising the arrivals.

2. The Ten Thousand Faithful

This chamber is vast, an upturned basin of stone many thousands of feet across. There are drow here, many thousands of them, camped across the cavern floor as if for an epic battle. Nine banners stand high above the crowds, each with an emblem on a purple background. The drow's mood, though, is not that of warriors facing possible death. There is singing, dancing, drinking and celebration. One group has a drow priestess dancing on a table while her warrior friends cheer, another group roars out an obscene song, while the members of another all stand in a circle and drink simultaneously, tossing the bottles aside when they are done. These revels are more like the behaviour of the Threnody in Velvet than that of the mainstream drow of Ashfar.

These drow have good reason to celebrate, as they are the ones whose places in the Hez'Uril are assured. They wait for transfiguration, the process by which the body is consumed by fire and the soul placed into a soulstone.

The groups of drow around the outside of the cavern are from the military. Each group is made up of two hundred foot soldiers, ten field commanders, five war-wizards and a priestess. The inner groups are the civilians.

The nine banners mark the mustering points of the nine houses of the Ennead. The leaders of all of the houses spend part of the day here, marshalling their people and checking that they are prepared for the transfiguration.

3. The Spider Warrens

The walls and ceilings of this run of caves are bedecked with spider webs hanging down in ragged strands. The rock is crawling with life.

This is where the spiders of Har'Ahano were taken after their evacuation from that doomed plane. They wait patiently for the arrival of She, who will lead them onto the Ebon Egg and from there to the new world. Player Characters who explore this area find themselves in the presence of about three hundred spider swarms per cave with giant vermin of various sizes lurking among them. The central cave of the warrens is the home of a devastation spider and the vermiurge ruling Har'Ahano's Spider Nation (if it has not already been killed).

Lady Vel'Azrit (see page 207) spends much of her time here, collecting venom and making friends with the arachnids.

Attendant Priestesses: A group of eight drow priestesses comes here twice per day and *summons* repeated swarms of insects to make sure the spiders' webs are well filled.

4. The Chamber of Transfiguration

Ten male and female drow dressed in simple unadorned black robes are gathered at one end of this room. Their expressions

The Eclipse Protocol

The heads of the Ennead are well aware that powerful and determined opponents could still sabotage their plans, though they are now far advanced. They have prepared a plan of action which they refer to as the Eclipse Protocol, to be implemented immediately if the project is threatened with failure. Only the nine rulers of the Ennead know about the Eclipse Protocol.

The plan has four stages:

1. Notify the goddess and her counsellor that the Eclipse Protocol is being enacted.

2. Activate the planar destruction device. This leaves ten minutes for the heads of the Ennead to leave the plane of Irilian.

3. If the Perfected is still alive, take him and head for the Ebon Egg. Any of the rulers of the Ennead who are not at the Ebon Egg with three minutes left to go are to be left behind.

4. Depart Irilian to rendezvous with She and Arkady at the shores of the Dark.

The Ennead members are only concerned only with saving themselves. They have come too far now to let sentimentality thwart them, so the ten thousand faithful will just have to perish along with the rest of the multiverse.

are halfway between fear and excitement. At the other end of the room is a stone fitment like a font liberally splashed with blood, as if hundreds of creatures have bled to death here. In the font's bowl is a lump of some sort of dark matter, impossible to see clearly against all the blood. It might be an internal organ, or perhaps a piece of smooth stone. Against the east wall is a table or altar covered with black silk cloth, on which are eight or nine velvet bags.

An archway to the north leads into another room that you cannot see clearly; there is smoke coming from it, along with a smell like roasted meat and burning hair.

Standing beside the font are two weary-eyed drow priestesses dressed in ceremonial finery, their hair braided up into silver nets. Kneeling between them is a drow male, advanced in years. He blinks nervously. The older of the priestesses begins to speak in a hoarse voice, chanting the syllables of a ritual you do not recognise; then she draws a blade and places it to the kneeling drow's throat.

If nothing happens to interrupt the rite, the priestess slashes the drow's throat open and his blood fountains into the font. The object in the font is a soulstone, which glows cherry-red briefly as it accepts the drow's soul. The priestess wipes her brow wearily – they have been doing this for hours and have another five dozen to 'transfigure' before they can rest – and her assistant drags the limp corpse out through the doorway to the north.

The priestess then places the stone in a velvet bag with a name sewn into it and sets it alongside others on the low altar; these will be taken to the Ebon Egg at the end of the day's work. The next candidate for transfiguration then steps forward.

Furnace Room: This is where the physical remains of the transfigured are taken for burning. The northern wall is set with many small cavities, horribly like a baker's oven, with plates that slide out to accept bodies. The region beyond seethes with magical fires which deal 20d6 points of fire damage per round to any creature or object that lands there.

Soulstone Room: This long vault is where the empty soulstones are kept. There are thousands of them on racks upon the wall, awaiting use. A character who examines these and makes a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 30) or Knowledge (religion) check (DC 30) can work out their purpose.

5. The Rooms of the Perfected

These halls have been decorated with rich silks and furnished with items that would grace the palace of an emperor: carpets in sunset hues, cabinets inlaid with subtle platinum chasing and a beautiful chaise lounge of gilded wood and soft black leather. The walls are hung with images of the Spider Goddess of the drow, giving the place an atmosphere half devout and half obsessive.

If the union ceremony has not yet taken place, the groom is waiting here:

The drow male reclining on the chaise longue is strikingly handsome. Indeed, physically speaking, he seems flawless, a paragon of his race.

This is the Perfected, the drow male who is to be the father of a new race. The drow have bred him for the role, indoctrinating him throughout his whole life, preparing him for the highest honour that any drow has ever received. Though intelligent, he is naïve and spoiled, having grown used

to the world revolving around him and his needs. Despite the description, he is not a paragon creature, but merely a 1st level drow aristocrat.

Lady Zaura (see page 208) is often here (50% chance) admiring this perfect specimen of the drow race. Lady Ajav'Andu (see page 209) also visits this room frequently (50% chance) to perform various rites of anointing and preparation.

6. The Hall of Union

This chamber is quite evidently a temple. A vast idol of the Spider Goddess takes up the entirety of the eastern wall. Her eight limbs form an enclosure, which you see has been floored with luxurious carpets and cushions.

Eight tall sconces have been set in a circle on the floor, their flames burning and jetting forth bright violet sparks. There is an atmosphere of ritual here. Something of great significance has just happened, or is just about to happen.

When it is time for the Ritual of Union to take place (which is whenever the Games Master feels it is dramatically appropriate), the Perfected is led here by two priestess attendants. Lady Ajav'Andu then enters, assures herself that all is well and begins to perform a lengthy ritual of *summoning*. This takes her thirty minutes to complete and is really no more than a formality, as the goddess She can appear whenever she chooses.

At the end of the summoning, the figure of She – the goddess manifest in the flesh – takes form within the summoning circle. She then mates with the Perfected while still in spider form, a process too revolting to describe. In the course of this mating she bites off his head, as is the habit of black widows. She then devours the rest of his body. Three minutes after the goddess has been impregnated, she lays a clutch of gleaming white eggs, then fades into nothingness.

Attacking the Goddess: The Player Characters should be aware that even at their epic levels of advancement they have no chance to prevail against a deity. Fortunately for them, during this ritual the goddess is too absorbed in what she is doing to notice them. If they do attack her, the Legions of the Realm Imponderable manifest in the room, removing their armour and appearing in their full glory as gods. They place a barrier around the Player Characters and drive the Spider Goddess away with blasts of divine radiance. They then urge the Player Characters to hurry to find the planar destruction device while they head to the shores of the Dark to intercept the Ebon Egg.

The Eggs: The eggs are soft leathery sacs as large as humans. They can be slashed open easily. After the goddess has departed, Ajav'Andu orders a pair of priestesses to bring the eggs down to the Ebon Egg, where they are reverently placed in the hold.

7. The Detonation Point

A barrier of shifting rainbow-coloured energies blocks the narrow corridor ahead.

This room has been sealed inside a permanent *prismatic sphere* (caster level 28th) to prevent tampering. Beyond it is a sight that the Player Characters immediately recognise:

This small stone crevice has only one object in it: a cylinder made from metal rods, with two spheres held in force fields, one blindingly bright, the other utterly dark. They are only two feet apart. A constant stream of energy whirls from the bright sphere into the black one.

The goddess Arkady has placed the planar destruction device under a *nondetection* effect to prevent any other deities from thwarting the drow plan. It can be seen by physical sight but is otherwise immune to magical detection methods.

Lord Vesperlean (see page 205) spends much of his time here, checking that the device is stable. The Player Characters have a 65% chance to encounter him here.

If the Eclipse Protocol is activated, Lord Vesperlean *teleports* to the sphere, bypasses it and commands the planar destruction device to enter its final countdown. The device detonates ten minutes later, obliterating the plane and beginning the final collapse of the multiverse. The only hope left is for the Player Characters to pursue the fleeing drow, who enter the Ebon Egg and fly within it to the shores of the Dark.

8. The Chamber of the Ebon Egg

Before you is a rift in the earth, opening deep and wide like a crevasse. The passageway extends out into the gulf, forming a narrow bridge of rock.

Hovering in the rift, silent and motionless, is an egg of black rock with whorls carved into its sides, like a gigantic monument to some forgotten deity. It is easily three hundred feet high. The weightlessness of it seems obscene, as if it ought to come crashing down at any moment. The bridge leads into an open archway in the egg's side.

The interior of the Egg is a series of simple storage bays. A few of these have already been filled with boxes of soulstones, carefully padded against a rough journey. The bottom section of the Egg is for the spiders from Har'Ahano to fill. The upper section is where the eggs of the goddess are to be stored.

Egg Transit Control: The central column inside the Egg has a stone handprint glowing a faint violet colour. This is the key to sending the Egg on its journey to the Dark. It is currently attuned only to Lady Ashgrave and Lord Vesperlean, to prevent anyone from hijacking it. A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 30) or Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 30) ascertains that the Egg is set for a course to the very outermost limit of the multiverse.

This is the final clue to saving the planes from destruction. That point must be where the Dark manifests in order to communicate with its servants. If it is manifest, it is vulnerable.

A Player Character can attempt to activate the Egg with a Use Magic Device check (DC 40). Player Characters can also use Divination magic to find the precise sequence of mental commands needed to activate the Egg.

9. The Elite Apartments

These are the chambers in which dwell the members of the Ennead. At any given time a member of the Ennead has a 30% chance to be in his or her room.

9a: Lady Ashgrave's Chamber

This stone sanctuary is part mausoleum and part bedchamber. A marble tomb is in the room's centre, with a sleeping mat laid on top of it. The arrangement of the furniture suggests that this is not an ad hoc *arrangement but the way the room is supposed to be. At the head of the tomb is a glass case containing a skull, surrounded by fresh-looking roses.*

The walls are hung with portraits of a young drow male dressed in a black toga, with the Spider Goddess above and behind him looking on approvingly and the smoky, skeletal figure of Arkady on the other side presenting him with some sort of scroll or map. A bronze bust of the same drow sits on a pedestal against the west wall.

The bones of Tomocho, Lady Ashgrave's favourite, lie in the marble tomb except for his skull, which is in the case. This room is her personal shrine to him.

When it is time to depart this plane, she reverently gathers up his bones in a blanket and takes them into the Ebon Egg with her, as she is convinced that the Dark will bring him back to life in the world that is to come.

9b: Lord Vesperlean's Study

The door to this room is *wizard locked* as well as having a conventional lock.

There does not seem to be a single surface in this series of rooms that is not covered with books. The furniture is buried beneath layers of tomes and scrolls. There is a bedroll in the corner with a pile of books next to it which evidently serves the sleeper as a table, since there is a half-eaten meal on it. The place looks as though a library has been emptied into it without any attempt to sort out the books.

Vesperlean's books are in disarray because he does not see the point in sorting them when the multiverse is about to end. He is planning to load them onto the Ebon Egg when the time comes using a *teleportation circle*. He is waiting until the last minute to do this, as he does not trust anyone else not to steal his precious books before then.

A search of the room with a Search check (DC 20) discovers the *scroll of teleportation circle* that Vesperlean is keeping against the day when he has to clean his books out of here in a hurry.

9c: Lord Charrox's Room

This room is laid out with complete precision as if a butler has seen to it. On the stone table to the west is a collection of knives, fanned out in a circle with the blades pointing inward and spotlessly clean. A weapons rack on the east wall holds swords from the different nations of Ashfar: a dragon-prince's katana from Kandang in its lacquered sheath, a claymore from Ghael, an elven rapier of Shallenoi, all exquisite examples of swordsmithing.

The weapons are all masterwork. None of them are magical. Although he practices with them, Charrox collects them for their beauty, not their functional use.

9d: Huntress Cestine's Chambers

This room's most striking feature is the coffin-like object in the corner. It looks like a mithral sarcophagus, or perhaps an iron maiden, moulded to the approximate shape of a female body. The rest of the room is taken up with half-unpacked crates which you can see have ancient sets of leather armour, swords, maces and items of clothing spilling out of them.

The coffin is where Cestine slept through the last thousand years in *temporal stasis*, waiting to take back the leadership of her house when the Drow War came. It is currently empty. The crates contain her personal effects, which she has not yet had the time or inclination to unpack.

A Player Character who roots around through her possessions with a Search check (DC 20) can discover a worn, unremarkable-looking hand axe, the edge of which has clearly been sharpened over and over again. This is the axe that Cestine used to butcher the captive elves at the Ziggurat of Smoke. She has kept it as a memento of those happy times.

9e. Lady Vel'Azrit's Laboratory

This room has the stink of death about it. The western wall of the place is filled with small dead animals in wooden boxes topped with glass. Each corpse is contorted as if it died in pain. The bodies do not seem to have decayed, though some of them have been partly dissected.

The eastern wall is taken up with a workbench fitted up with spirit burners, flasks, crystallisation dishes and hundreds of neatly stacked jars. Piled up next to it is a stack of notebooks. Against the north wall are several dozen cages containing rats.

The wooden boxes are all extremely minor magic items that bestow *gentle repose* effects on the dead creatures inside them. Lady Vel'Azrit concocts poisons at the workbench, tests them on the animals and records the results, keeping the bodies preserved to examine later.

The notebooks contain Vel'Azrit's research notes, written in Undercommon. They contain grim descriptions of the deaths of hundreds of creatures and the fascinating conclusions to be drawn. The jars contain five doses of each poison listed in the *DMG*.

9f. Lady Aisha's Room

Whoever uses this room has a strongly devout nature. There is an altar against the west wall, taking up most of the available space, with a welter of symbols fixed around it. The altar bears a grotesque image of a spider sitting as if it were a person, its back legs folded under its swollen abdomen. It is wrought from platinum and set with gems.

The sleeping area in the corner has a second idol, this one an image of Arkady made from a silver skeleton encased in smoked glass. Unlike the spider, this idol looks expertly crafted.

The spider idol is worth 16,000 gold pieces in materials. Anyone making an Appraise check (DC 20) concludes that the style is artless and primitive. It is as if someone has spent a vast amount of money on precious materials and then tried to make a devotional image without having the necessary talent. The idol of Arkady is worth 5,000 gold pieces.

A search of the room using a Search check (DC 20) turns up a collection of devotional scroll cases under the bedroll, which when opened contain obsessive love poems to 'the Mistress' instead of the divine spells that they would normally be expected to hold.

9g. Lord Daivon's Nest

This room is featureless but for a heap of chewed bones in the corner. A crack in the wall large enough for a human to squeeze through leads into a dark space beyond.

Lord Daivon sleeps here very occasionally, when he wants to be sure of making a meeting on time. The tunnels behind the crack are where he hunts as a purple worm. The bones are those of a subordinate drow who displeased him and was eaten.

9h. Lady Zaura's Den

The walls of this room are hung with flags. More precisely, with one flag in many different shapes and sizes; the spider-emblazoned black-on-red flag of the Drow Empire. The largest is immaculate, but the others are all tattered, partly burned, bloodstained or simply faded with age. A table has been set against the far wall under the flag. You note that the person who lives here has even used a Drow Empire flag as a bedspread.

The stylised backs of the chairs feature the same design, as do the silver plate and goblet laid out on the table. Whoever lives in this room is a patriot, a zealot or both. A collection of scrolls has been neatly stacked on the table.

The scrolls, on examination, prove to be a history of the Wars of Purification as written by Lady Zaura. She is attempting to write a definitive history of the Drow Wars from her side's viewpoint. Even a cursory check over these reveals them to be the work of a deranged adolescent who cannot bear the thought of other races breathing the same air as she, and who cannot seem to write about anything else.

A Knowledge (history) check (DC 20) reveals that Zaura has added some elements that are completely fictional, such as the 'gnome experiments' in which a group of especially stunted gnomes attempted to meddle with the purity of the drow race by tainting them with magical diseases; the infected drow would have had children with ears more like those of gnomes than those of true drow, and could thus have been identified as a defective bloodline. A Sense Motive check (DC 20) perceives the author of this stuff to be teetering on the edge of madness.

9i. Lady Ajav'Andu's Suite

At first you think you see a figure standing to your left, dressed in a long heavy robe of indigo and gold. A second glance reveals it to be a mannequin made

from dark wood on which someone has hung the robe. There is a strange object like a chainmail coif on top of it, but the chain links are woven in strands rather than a sheet, as if to make a chainmail wig.

The room smells of incense and history. The furnishings are all antiques, a collection assembled by someone with exceptional taste. There is a dresser, a washstand, a sumptuous bed, a cabinet and a writing desk, all looking to be well over a thousand years old. The style is elven, with a touch of macabre darkness to it. The table legs have a hint of resemblance to bones, while the repeated motifs on the cabinet are either abstract leaf patterns or screaming elven faces, depending on how you look at them.

The robe is Lady Ajav'Andru's ceremonial attire. It is over three thousand years old, lovingly preserved from her first days as a priestess in Bahl-I-Shabran. Its material value alone is 20,000 gold pieces; a collector would probably pay triple that because of its scarcity.

A small room to the east holds a simple private altar with the image of She upon it, wrought in black iron. Within the altar is a shard of tenebrium, a fragment of the Abyssal Altar – the last surviving fragment anywhere in the universe.

10. The Council Chamber

The shape of a titanic spider fills this room, arching above like living architecture, its limbs as thick as tree trunks. Beneath the spider's abdomen is a circular table of polished black marble with a golden model tree, three feet high, growing from its centre. The tree has globes hanging from it, each the size of a fist. Around the table are nine stone pedestals, presumably seats. The table has a circular bump in front of each pedestal, like a bowl turned upside down.

This is where the Ennead meets to discuss the progress of the great project. The spider is merely an illusion (caster level 28th), an image of the Goddess to show the group's piety and remind them whose patronage they enjoy.

When the members need to vote on an issue, they place their hands on the stone bumps and mentally vote *'yes'* or *'no'*. This causes one of the globes of the golden tree to glow red or blue, signifying a vote for or against the motion in question.

There is a slim chance (5%) that all of the members of the Ennead are here at once when the room is first encountered, and a 10% chance that 1d4 randomly chosen members are here, discussing plans or waiting for a meeting to begin. Otherwise the room stands empty.

The Unveiling of the Legions

At some stage of this adventure or the next, the Legions of the Realm Imponderable reveal themselves as the Gods of Ashfar and help the Player Characters. This is an awe-inspiring sight, as beams of light lance through the plates of their leaden armour and the five deities stand revealed in majesty.

There are no statistics provided for the gods. Open Game Content rules for deities are available but are not covered here. For game purposes, the Games Master should simply assume that they can destroy any mortal foe or instantly heal any Player Character, and that they are vulnerable only to other deities.

The Gods of Ashfar only intervene if the stakes are high enough to demand it. They have been waiting to find out what She has been planning, and as a result of this adventure they finally know the full truth. If they had moved against the Spider Goddess any sooner, she would have been forewarned and would have made quite certain that no one could follow her people here.

For all their power, the Gods are unable to do what the Player Characters need to do. They cannot enter the Dark. The Player Characters must take the last step alone without their Gods to assist them.

Note for the Games Master: The Gods are not here to take over from the Player Characters and win the day – nothing is worse than having a crisis averted by the actions of super-powerful Non-Player Characters – but to provide drama, help the story along and answer the frustrating question of who the Legions are. Rather than have them appear and stay around, the Games Master should use them as a one-time-only damage limitation method, as in the following events:

- If the Player Characters attack the goddess She, the Gods can intervene to save them; they then have to keep her busy and prevent her from sending any outsiders after the Player Characters while they hurry to the planar destruction device or the Ebon Egg.

- If the Player Characters fail to reach the planar destruction device in time, the Gods can hold the explosion back, though it takes tremendous effort to do so. They urge the Player Characters to reach the shores of the Dark and do what they can against the entity that is manifest there while they keep the planes stable.

- If the Player Characters do not successfully hide away inside the Ebon Egg or manage to hijack it, the Gods can transport them to the shores of the Dark, though they themselves cannot go there. If deities could enter that realm, they would have done so long ago. All deities who have attempted the journey have found their divine forces drained further and further away the closer they came. Only lesser creatures can travel so far into nothingness. Presumably deities whom the Dark *protects* are safe there, but only She and Arkady fit that description.

However the Gods are used, the feel of the encounter should be the same: 'We have kept one disaster from happening, but in doing so, we have helped as much as we can; we cannot do anything more. It is all down to you now.' Of course, the Player Characters may not need help, in which case the Gods do not unveil themselves until the universe is safe again.

The Ennead

The following drow are the archvillains of the entire campaign. Each is a powerful foe in his or her own right. Together they are practically unstoppable.

Using the Ennead: The descriptions of the tunnels above explain where each member of the Ennead is likely to be found and when, but there is no set order in which the Player Characters must meet them.

The climax of this chapter depends on the Player Characters' actions. They may face all of the Ennead's leaders or none of them. If the Games Master can handle the paperwork and dice rolling, there can even be a battle royale between the members of the Assembly and the leaders of the Ennead. Some of them may escape to the shores of the Dark (see next chapter), where a final confrontation will take place.

Lady Ashgrave of House Jar'Allin

Lady Ashgrave rules the Ennead with an authority tempered over five centuries. Her hair is iron-grey and her expression completely merciless. She has stared down demons and endured battle wounds that would cause a common soldier to faint, talking calmly with her surgeons as they stitched her body shut. Since the death of her favourite concubine Tomocho in the Drow War before last, she has never been seen to smile. She keeps his skull in a glass cabinet like a holy relic. Privately she dreams that when the World to Come is a reality, she will be reunited with him.

Lady Ashgrave, Female Drow Clr18/Ftr10: CR 29; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 18d8 plus 10d10; hp 136; Init +10; Spd 30 ft.; AC 41, touch 21, flat-footed 40; Base Atk +19; Grp +21; Atk +35 melee (1d6+16/15–20, *+12 vorpal scimitar*) or +32 ranged (special, *+10 net*) or +36 ranged (1d8+14/19–20, *+14 light crossbow*); Full Atk +35/+30/+25/+20 melee (1d6+16/15–20, *+12 vorpal scimitar*) or +32 ranged (special, *+10 net*) or +36/+31/+26/+21 melee (1d8+14/19–20, *+14 light crossbow*); SA poison, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ damage resistance 15/ adamantine, drow traits, spell resistance 41; AL LE; SV Fort +18, Ref +12, Will +26; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 32, Cha 20.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +18, Craft (calligraphy) +15, Diplomacy +14, Handle Animal +18, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (history) +11, Knowledge (religion) +11, Knowledge (the planes) +11, Listen +13, Ride +17, Search +4, Spellcraft +20, Spot +13; Cleave, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Epic Prowess, Improved Critical (scimitar), Improved Initiative, Improved Spell Resistance, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Negative Energy Burst, Planar Turning, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Rapid Reload, Superior Initiative, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Specialisation (scimitar).

Spells prepared (6/8+1/8+1/8+1/7+1/7+1/6+1/6+1/5+1/5+1, save DC 21 + spell level): 0th *– detect magic, guidance* (2)*, read magic, resistance, virtue;* 1st *– bane, bless, command, comprehend languages, cure light wounds* (2)*, protection from good*, sanctuary, shield of faith;* 2nd *– aid, bull's strength, calm emotions*, darkness, owl's wisdom, resist energy, silence, sound burst, spiritual weapon;* 3rd *– blindness/deafness, dispel magic* (3)*, magic circle against good*, magic vestment, prayer, protection from energy, speak with dead;* 4th *– cure critical wounds* (2)*, dismissal, divine power* (2)*, restoration, spell immunity, unholy blight*;* 5th *– dispel good*, flame strike* (2)*, mass cure light wounds* (2)*, slay living* (2)*, true seeing;* 6th *– blade barrier, greater dispel magic* (2)*, harm, heal, hold monster*, mass bear's endurance;* 7th *– blasphemy** (2)*, dictum, mass cure serious wounds* (3)*, repulsion;* 8th *– dimensional lock, fire storm, mass cure critical wounds* (2)*, symbol of death, unholy aura*;* 9th *– energy drain, mass heal, miracle* (2)*, storm of vengeance, summon monster IX** (evil only).
*Domain spell.

Domains: Evil (cast Evil spells at +1 caster level), Law (cast Law spells at +1 caster level).

Equipment & Treasure: +12 full plate of fortification, +14 light crossbow, +10 net, +12 vorpal scimitar, cloak of epic charisma +10, crossbow bolts (10)*, periapt of epic wisdom +12, ring of epic protection +10, ring of weaponbreaking.*

Lord Vesperlean of House Maugheeth

Lord Vesperlean is silent most of the time, which is why Lady Ashgrave favours him. He speaks only when there is something important to say and insists that everyone else pay attention when he does. He is easily offended; the most infuriating thing anyone can do to him is to ignore his advice or take him lightly. He is tall for a drow and rake-thin. His hair has mostly fallen out, leaving straggly white wisps around a shiny bald scalp.

Lord Vesperlean, Male Drow Wiz27: CR 28; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 27d4; hp 67; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 22, touch 22, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +14; Grp +14; Atk +14 melee (1d6, *staff of the cosmos*); Full Atk +14/+9 melee (1d6, *staff of the cosmos*); SA spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 38; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +11, Will +16; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 32, Wis 13, Cha 16.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +31, Decipher Script +41, Knowledge (arcana) +41, Knowledge (history) +41, Knowledge (nature) +41, Knowledge (the planes) +41, Spellcraft +55; Combat Casting, Dodge, Enlarge Spell[B], Epic Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Epic Spellcasting, Extend Spell[B], Improved Combat Casting, Improved Spell Capacity (10th), Maximise Spell[B], Multispell, Quicken Spell[B], Scribe Scroll[B], Skill Focus (Concentration), Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Focus (Evocation), Spell Penetration, Still Spell.

Spells prepared (4/7/7/7/6/6/6/6/5/5/1, save DC 21 + spell level): 0th *– mage hand, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue;* 1st *– mage armour* (2)*, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, shield, true strike* (2)*;* 2nd *– bear's endurance, blur, detect thoughts, hideous laughter, levitate, scorching ray* (2)*;* 3rd *– dispel magic* (3)*, fireball, haste, hold person, vampiric touch;* 4th *– black tentacles, dimension door, greater*

invisibility, ice storm, resilient sphere, stoneskin; 5th *– cone of cold, interposing hand, scorching ray* (maximised) (3), *wall of force;* 6th *– antimagic field, disintegrate, globe of invulnerability, greater dispel magic* (2), *lightning bolt* (maximised)*;* 7th *– delayed blast fireball* (2), *dispel magic* (quickened), *greater teleport, hold person* (quickened), *spell turning;* 8th *– black tentacles* (quickened), *polar ray* (2), *stoneskin* (quickened), *trap the soul;* 9th *– gate, mass hold monster, prismatic sphere, teleport* (quickened), *wish;* 10th *– mislead* (quickened).

Epic spells per day: 3
Epic spells known: Hellball, ruin

Equipment & Treasure: Headband of epic intellect +12, ring of energy immunity (electrical), *ring of epic protection +10, staff of the cosmos.*

Lord Charrox of House Vaspil

Lord Charrox thrives on warfare above all else. He is the overall commander of the Ennead's military forces, answering only to Lady Ashgrave. His face was burned half off long ago by an acidic blast that has never healed; his right cheek is open to the bone and his teeth can be seen through it. As a result, he speaks with a rasping lisp. He avoids casting arcane spells with verbal components, as they have a 10% chance of spell failure; hence his choice of epic feats.

Lord Charrox, Male Drow Wiz19/Arc8/Ftr1: CR 29; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 19d4+19 plus 8d8+8 plus 1d10+1; hp 117; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 35, touch 19, flat-footed 32; Base Atk +14; Grp +17; Atk +26 melee (1d8+11/19–20, *+8 longsword*) or +29 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+10 composite longbow of distant shot* (+3 Str bonus)); Full Atk +26/+21 melee (1d8+11/19–20, *+8 longsword*) or +29/+24 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+10 composite longbow of distant shot* (+3 Str bonus)) or +27/+27/+22 ranged (1d8+13/x3, *+10 composite longbow of distant shot* (+3 Str bonus)); SA enhance arrow +4, *hail of arrows, imbue arrow, phase arrow, seeker arrow,* spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 39; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +13, Will +15; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 19, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Concentration +20, Craft (armourer) +31, Decipher Script +23, Hide +11, Intimidate +4, Jump +7, Knowledge (arcana) +23, Listen +10, Move Silently +11, Profession (military commander) +11, Ride +15, Search +6, Spellcraft +26, Spot +10, Use Rope +11; Automatic Silent Spell, Automatic Still Spell, Combat Casting, Craft Magical Arms and Armour, Craft Ring, Craft Wand, Epic Prowess, Improved Counterspell, Improved Spell Penetration, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Penetration, Still Spell, Weapon Focus (longbow).

Spells prepared (4/5/5/5/5/4/4/4/3/3, save DC 14 + spell level): 0th *– detect magic, message, open/close, read magic;* 1st *– grease, shield, true strike (3);* 2nd *– blur, cat's grace* (2), *ghoul touch, shatter;* 3rd *– displacement, fireball, haste, lightning bolt, vampiric touch;* 4th *– greater invisibility, rainbow pattern, stoneskin, wall of fire, wall of ice;* 5th *– cloudkill, feeblemind, hold monster, transmute rock to mud;* 6th *– disintegrate, greater dispel magic, repulsion, wall of iron;* 7th *– mage's sword, prismatic spray, spell turning, waves of exhaustion;* 8th *– mass charm monster, moment of prescience, prismatic wall;* 9th *– etherealness, foresight, mage's disjunction.*

Equipment & Treasure: +12 elven chain shirt, +10 composite longbow of far shot, +8 longsword, arrows (20), *ring of protection +6.*

Huntress Cestine of House Sathron

Lady Cestine, the Huntress, is a wild one among the Ennead, with an insatiable appetite for depravity and wickedness. Her tastes often bring her into conflict with Ashgrave, as her degenerate life makes her late for meetings, unpredictable in her behaviour and unreliable as a comrade. Cestine's strength is in her popularity among the drow. They look to her as a war hero.

The elves of Ashfar call Cestine 'the Blood Bitch'. She was in charge of the genocides during the second Equinox of the Heroes in which over three thousand captive elves were systematically beheaded at the Ziggurat of Smoke, a now-destroyed drow sacred site at Brith's Folly.

Cestine was recently revived after spending more than a millennium in *temporal stasis*, in accordance with a covenant made with her House that she would return to lead them when the Equinox of the Heroes came round again. Any elf encountering Cestine may make a Knowledge (history) check (DC 20) to recognise her.

Huntress Cestine, Female Drow Ftr27: CR 28; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 27d10+27; hp 175; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 36, touch 13, flat-footed 33; Base Atk +24; Grp +29; Atk +44 melee (1d8+21/17–20, *+10 keen longsword*) or +42 ranged (1d8+17/x3, *+10 composite longbow* (+5 Str bonus)); Full Atk +44/+39/+34/+29 melee (1d8+21/17–20, *+10 keen longsword*) or +42/+37/+32/+27 ranged (1d8+17/x3, *+10 composite longbow* (+5 Str bonus)) or +40/+40/+35/+30/+25 ranged (1d8+17/x3, *+10 composite longbow* (+5 Str bonus)); SA poison, spell-like abilities; SQ darkvision 120 ft., drow traits, spell resistance 39; AL NE; SV Fort +16, Ref +12, Will +9; Str 20, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Skills & Feats: Climb +11, Handle Animal +8, Intimidate +18, Jump +8, Listen +12, Profession (military commander) +10, Ride +9, Search +4, Spot +13, Swim +6; Cleave, Combat Archery, Dodge, Epic Prowess (4), Epic Weapon Specialisation (longsword), Great Cleave, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Rapid Shot, Shot on the Run, Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialisation (longbow), Weapon Specialisation (longsword).

Equipment & Treasure: +10 composite longbow, +8 elven chain, +8 heavy steel shield, +10 keen longsword, arrows (20).

Lady Vel'Azrit of House Tzanvine

Lady Vel'Azrit is the Ennead's poison mistress, collecting and brewing venom for the nobility. She reached her position in her own House by disposing of all the rival claimants. She is an espionage specialist and serves as the head of Ashgrave's secret police, making sure that crimes of disloyalty are publicly punished. The Lady is young by drow standards, resembling a girl of eighteen, and keeps her silver hair shaved short. She has a tattoo of a snake winding around the entire length of her body from her right foot to her left hand.

Lady Vel'Azrit, Female Drow Rog18/Asn10: CR 29; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 28d6; hp 98; Init +10; Spd 30 ft.; AC 30, touch 20, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +18; Grp +18; Atk +36 melee (1d6+8/18–20, *+8 rapier of elf dread*) or +36 ranged (1d10+8/19–20, *+8 heavy crossbow of unerring accuracy*); Full Atk +36/+31/+26 melee (1d6+8/18–20, *+8 rapier of elf dread*) or +36 ranged (1d10+8/19–20, *+8 heavy crossbow of unerring accuracy*); SA crippling strike, death attack, opportunist, poison, sneak attack +14d6, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, evasion, hide in plain sight, improved evasion, improved uncanny dodge, spell resistance 39, trap sense +6; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +28, Will +13; Str 10, Dex 31, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 18.

Skills & Feats: Appraise +3, Balance +23, Bluff +30, Climb +5, Decipher Script +5, Diplomacy +20, Disable Device +18, Disguise +20 (+24 acting), Escape Artist +26, Forgery +3, Gather Information +15, Hide +36, Intimidate +16, Listen +10, Move Silently +36, Open Lock +17, Perform (dance) +10, Search +6, Sense Motive +10, Sleight of Hand +16, Spot +8, Tumble +35, Use Magic Device +8, Use Rope +10; Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Death Attack, Improved Feint, Iron Will, Lingering Damage, Mobility, Sneak Attack of Opportunity, Spellcasting Harrier, Weapon Finesse.

Spells known (4/4/3/3, save DC 12 + spell level): 1st *– disguise self, feather fall, ghost sound, true strike;* 2nd *– cat's grace, invisibility, spider climb, undetectable alignment;* 3rd *– deep slumber, misdirection, nondetection;* 4th *– clairaudience/clairvoyance, greater invisibility, modify memory.*

Equipment & Treasure: +8 rapier of elf dread, +8 heavy crossbow of unerring accuracy, amulet of epic natural armour +10, arrows (20), *cloak of the bat, gloves of epic dexterity +12.*

Lady Aisha of House Shi'arni

Lady Aisha is one of life's followers. She lives in the shadow of Lady Ashgrave and is wholly devoted to her. It is clear to any observer that Aisha is hopelessly in love but unable to act on it. Lady Ashgrave sees this devotion as that of a faithful hound, something of which she can make use. She is occasionally deliberately cruel to Aisha, mocking her incompetence or stupidity, knowing that this only serves to fuel her devotion. If Aisha is ever in combat at the same time as Lady Ashgrave, she uses all the protective magic in her power to keep her mistress from harm, even if she has to kill herself in the process. Lady Aisha keeps her hair in a tight braid and bears a platinum spider ornament on her forehead, a sign of her faith that other drow find mawkish and rather embarrassing. They mock her about it behind her back.

Lady Aisha, Female Drow Clr26: CR 27; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 26d8+52; hp 169; Init +6; Spd 20 ft.; AC 31, touch 11, flat-footed 30; Base Atk +18; Grp +18; Atk +22 melee (1d6+4 plus 3d6 unholy/18–20, *+4 rapier of unholy power*) or +30 ranged (1d4+10/19–20, *+10 hand crossbow*) or +29 ranged (entanglement, *+8 net*); Full Atk +22/+17/+12 melee (1d6+4 plus 3d6 unholy/18–20, *+4 rapier of unholy power*) or +30 ranged (1d4+10/19–20, *+10 hand crossbow*) or +29 ranged (entanglement, *+8 net*); SA poison, rebuke undead, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, spell resistance 37; AL LE; SV Fort +21, Ref +11, Will +20; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 21, Cha 10.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +19, Diplomacy +3, Heal +17, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (history) +5, Knowledge (religion) +19, Knowledge (the planes) +3, Spellcraft +21; Epic Fortitude, Greater Spell Focus (Necromancy), Improved Combat Casting, Improved Counterspell, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Necromancy), Spell Penetration, Tenacious Magic (*unholy aura*), Weapon Proficiency (net).

Spells prepared (6/7+1/6+1/6+1/6+1/4+1/4+1/4+1/4+1, save DC 15 + spell level): 0th *– detect poison, guidance, mending, read magic, resistance, virtue;* 1st *– cure light wounds, divine favour* (2), *doom, entropic shield, protection from good*, sanctuary, shield of faith;* 2nd *– aid, bear's endurance, bull's strength, eagle's splendour, owl's wisdom, shield other*, status;* 3rd *– cure serious wounds, dispel magic, helping hand, magic circle against good*, meld into stone, prayer, protection from energy;* 4th *– cure critical wounds, divine*

power, freedom of movement, poison, restoration, sending, spell immunity;* 5th *– dispel good*, insect plague, plane shift, righteous might, slay living, symbol of pain, symbol of sleep;* 6th *– antimagic field*, forbiddance, greater dispel magic, greater glyph of warding, heal;* 7th *– blasphemy*, ethereal jaunt, repulsion, symbol of stunning, symbol of weakness;* 8th *– earthquake* (2)*, fire storm, mind blank*, unholy aura;* 9th *– mass heal* (3)*, miracle, prismatic sphere*.*
*Domain spell.

Domains: Evil (cast Evil spells at +1 caster level), Protection (target's next save within the next hour gains a +26 bonus, 1/day).

Equipment & Treasure: +10 full plate armour, +10 hand crossbow, +4 rapier of unholy power, crossbow bolts (10), heavy shield, *incense of meditation* (possibly already used, in which case all spells are maximised), *potion of bull's strength, potions of cure serious wounds* (2), *scroll of mass heal.*

Lord Daivon of House Chuchubar

Lord Daivon is a rarity among drow: a follower of the druid path. He likes to wander alone through the dank underworld, communing with the spiders and sleeping with the lichen for a bed.

House Chuchubar has always been the house most associated with fungus farming and the gathering of rare intoxicating roots. Strangely, the lower castes of House Chuchubar are the most reviled of all, as they are mere peasant farmers, while the upper castes are regarded as the noblest of all, as they control the supplies of food, herbal intoxicants and liquor.

Lord Daivon's preferred wild shape is that of a purple worm, as it is appropriate for his tunnel environment.

Daivon has low jowls and bloodshot eyes, a result of his frequent indulgence in his House's produce. His hair is a mess and his garments are often dirty, as he often spends the night sleeping on the bare floor of a cavern.

Lord Daivon Male Drow Drd26: CR 27; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 26d8; hp 117; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 33, touch 12, flat-footed 31; Base Atk +18; Grp +18; Atk +26 melee (1d6+8 plus 3d6 fire/18–20, *+8 scimitar of fiery blast*); Full Atk +26/+21/+16 melee (1d6+8 plus 3d6 fire/18–20, *+8 scimitar of fiery blast*); SA poison, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ a thousand faces, drow traits, immunity to venom, resist nature's lure, spell resistance 37, timeless body, trackless step, wild empathy, wild shape (Gargantuan animal) 8/day, wild shape (Huge elemental) 3/day, woodland stride; AL NE; SV Fort +15, Ref +11, Will +22; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 25, Cha 14.

Skills & Feats: Concentration +20, Handle Animal +29, Knowledge (nature) +29, Listen +31, Search +2, Spellcraft +29, Spot +2, Survival +9; Augmented Summoning, Dodge, Gargantuan Wild Shape, Improved Elemental Wild Shape, Magical Beast Wild Shape, Natural Spell, Spell Focus (Conjuration), Spell Focus (Evocation), Spell Focus (Transmutation), Spell Penetration.

Spells prepared (6/7/7/7/6/6/5/5/4/4, save DC 17 + spell level): 0th *– detect magic, guidance, know direction, purify food and drink, read magic, resistance;* 1st *– cure light wounds* (2)*, entangle* (3)*, longstrider, magic fang;* 2nd *– animal messenger, barkskin* (2)*, heat metal, resist energy, spider climb, summon swarm;* 3rd *– contagion, meld into stone, poison, quench, sleet storm, snare, stone shape;* 4th *– cure serious wounds* (2)*, flame strike* (3)*, spike stones*; 5th *– baleful polymorph, death ward, insect plague, stoneskin, wall of thorns* (2)*;* 6th *– greater dispel magic, ironwood, mass cat's grace, move earth* (2)*;* 7th *– creeping doom* (3)*, fire storm, transmute metal to wood;* 8th *– earthquake, finger of death, reverse gravity, whirlwind;* 9th *– foresight, shambler* (2)*, storm of vengeance.*

Equipment & Treasure: +10 heavy wooden shield of fire warding, +8 scimitar of fiery blast, shapeshifter's armour (+6 hide).

Lady Zaura of House Tzummu

Lady Zaura is the mentally unbalanced captain of the tunnel riders, nightmare-riding drow who patrol the outer reaches of their underground realm. She is insanely xenophobic, hating all creatures that are not drow. To her the drow are the unquestioned master race. It is not a matter of scripture or prophecy but of self-evident fact.

Her House has only been part of the ruling clans of the Ennead since the exile of the disgraced House Arakh.

Zaura is in awe of the Huntress Cestine, whom she sees as a folk hero come back to life. She is also completely besotted with the Perfected, the paragon drow created as the mate of She. If anything harms or worse, kills him (apart from She), she goes on a berserk crusade to slay the person responsible, cutting down anything that gets in her way.

Zaura is wild-eyed and beautiful, at least by elven standards, with high cheekbones and a narrow nose. She is often held up as an example of drow perfection. However, even her fellow drow find her racism a little extreme. Other creatures have to be allowed to exist or else the drow will have nobody to enslave; one cannot simply wipe them all out.

Lady Zaura, Female Drow Rgr26: CR 27; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 26d8; hp 117; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 34, touch 17, flat-footed 27; Base Atk +23; Grp +27; Atk +37 melee (1d8+14/17–20, *+10 keen longsword*) or +45 ranged (1d6+19/x3, *+15 composite shortbow* (+4 Str bonus)); Full Atk +35/+30/+25/+20 melee (1d8+14/17–20, *+10 keen longsword*) and +35/+30/+25/+20 melee (1d4+12 plus 1 Con/19–20, *+10 dagger of wounding*) or +45/+40/+35/+30 ranged (1d8+15/x3, *+15 composite shortbow* (+4 Str bonus)) or +43/+43/+38/+33/+28 ranged (1d8+19/x3, *+15 composite shortbow* (+4 Str bonus)); SA favoured enemies, poison, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ camouflage, evasion, hide in plain sight, swift tracker, woodland stride; AL NE; SV Fort +15, Ref +22, Will +13; Str 18*, Dex 25*, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 14.

*Includes inherent bonuses from *manuals* and *wishes.*

Skills & Feats: Climb +23, Handle Animal +11, Hide +27, Jump +14, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +21, Listen +35, Move Silently +16, Ride +27, Search +15, Spot +26, Survival +33, Use Rope +15; Bane of Enemies, Combat Reflexes, Endurance[B], Greater Two-Weapon Fighting[B], Improved Darkvision, Improved Manyshot, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting[B], Manyshot, Mobility, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Perfect Two-Weapon Fighting, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Track[B], Two-Weapon Fighting[B].

Note: Lady Zaura's attacks against her favoured enemies are made as if she were using *bane* weapons against them, i.e. they include a +2 enhancement bonus and deal +2d6 points of damage.

Spells prepared (4/4/4/4, save DC 14 + spell level): 1st – *entangle* (2), *longstrider, resist energy;* 2nd – *barkskin, bear's endurance, cat's grace, protection from energy;* 3rd – *cure moderate wounds* (4)*;* 4th – *commune with nature, cure serious wounds* (2), *freedom of movement.*

Favoured Enemies: Humanoid (elves) +8, humanoid (dwarves) +4, humanoid (humans) +4, humanoid (aquatic) +2, humanoid (gnomes) +2, humanoid (halflings) +2.

Equipment & Treasure: +15 composite shortbow, +10 dagger of wounding, +10 keen longsword, +15 leather armour, arrows (20).

Lady Ajav'Andu of House Ormil

Lady Ajav'Andu is the member of the Ennead in charge of religious rituals and communal worship. Lady Ashgrave is the titular head of all drow churches and she alone may rule on matters of doctrine, but Ajav'Andu has the executive office of supervising worship and officiating at ceremonies. She has the title of Supreme Hierophant. Her House, Ormil, supplies the drow community with more priestesses than any other House.

Lady Ajav'Andu is withered by age. Her hair is long gone, as are most of her teeth. She wears a ceremonial wig of fine silver chains that look nothing like hair. Her actual age is unknown but there are reliable accounts of her presence at the first attack on Shallenoi when the Drow Wars began. Lady Ashgrave fears her and her alone of all other drow. Indeed, Ashgrave governs only with Ajav'Andu's consent, and that is only because she does not want the job herself.

Some of the younger drow, drawing wild conclusions from her obvious old age, believe that she is a genuine immortal and cannot be killed.

Lady Ajav'Andu, Drow Clr23/Hie5: CR 29; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 23d8 plus 5d8; hp 126; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 45, touch 20, flat-footed 45; Base Atk +19; Grp +19; Atk +19 melee (1d6, *staff of necromancy*); Full Atk +19/+14/+9 melee (1d6, *staff of necromancy*); SA divine reach, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ drow traits, faith healing, spell power, spell resistance 39; AL LE; SV Fort +16, Ref +10, Will +23; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 25, Cha 25.

Skills & Feats: Diplomacy +10, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (history) +11, Knowledge (religion) +31, Spellcraft +31; Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (Necromancy), Greater Spell Penetration, Heighten Spell, Improved Alignment-Based Casting, Negative Energy Burst, Spell Focus (Necromancy), Spell Penetration, Spontaneous Domain Access (Evil).

Divine Reach (2): Lady Ajav'Andu can use touch spells on targets up to 60 feet away. If the spell requires a melee touch attack, she must make a ranged touch attack instead. In combat, she uses this useful ability to confer *spell immunity* on her allies and cast *cure* spells upon them. She also uses it to strike enemies with *inflict* and *harm* spells.

Faith Healing: The Lady can use healing spells to their maximum effect on lawful evil creatures, including herself. Any spell with the healing descriptor cast on such creatures works as if under the effects of a Maximise Spell feat, without using a higher-level spell slot.

Spell Power (2): Lady Ajav'Andu's caster level is effectively 30th for caster-level-dependent spell variables and caster level checks, and is raised to 33rd when casting spells with the evil descriptor.

Spells prepared (6/7+1/7+1/7+1/6+1/6+1/5+1/5+1/4+1/4+1, save DC 17 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, detect poison, guidance, resistance;* 1st – *detect good, divine favour* (3), *entropic shield, protection from good*, sanctuary, shield of faith;* 2nd – *cure moderate wounds* (4), *death knell*, enthral, owl's wisdom, silence;* 3rd – *cure serious wounds* (4), *dispel magic, magic circle against good*, magic vestment, protection from energy;* 4th – *cure critical wounds* (2), *death ward*, divine power, restoration, spell immunity, unholy blight;* 5th – *dispel good, slay living** (4), *true seeing, wall of stone;* 6th – *blade barrier, create undead*, greater dispel magic, harm* (2), *heal;* 7th – *blasphemy, destruction** (2), *dictum, ethereal jaunt, regenerate;* 8th – *antimagic field, greater spell immunity* (2), *repulsion* (extended), *unholy aura*;* 9th – *gate, mass heal, miracle, storm of vengeance, wail of the banshee**.
*Domain spell.

Domains: Death (touched target dies if it has less than 28d6 hit points, 1/day), Evil (cast Evil spells at +1 caster level (but see Spell Power)).

Equipment & Treasure: +15 bracers of epic armour, amulet of epic natural armour +10, ring of epic protection +10, staff of necromancy.

Until the Sun Cries Morning

Summary: The Player Characters arrive at the outer limits of reality beyond the last of the frontier planes. There they finally confront the Dark and its terrible herald, the fallen angel Tuvellan.

Arriving at the Final Shore

What envelops you now is the silence and the darkness that has existed since before there was a universe.

There is a scrap of white sand beneath you, only three thousand or so feet across, a tiny island in the midst of an unending sea of black. You have never, ever been so far from home.

There are only two ways to reach the final shore. The Player Characters can come here in the Ebon Egg or by the power of a deity.

If they arrive in the Ebon Egg, it hovers nearby. Any drow also in the Egg disembark and stare into the void, as if hoping to watch the manifest universe explode spectacularly. In truth, there is very little to see, only white sand underfoot and endless blackness all around.

The Assembly: To end the campaign with a bang, the Assembly should be here along with the Player Characters. Bodiless Ao has a surprise to spring on them.

However, the Games Master should not force a storyline on the players if they decide they do not want the Assembly here. Unless the Player Characters have gone out of their way to make sure they are alone here, the members of the Assembly are also present, having *teleported*, *gated* or otherwise gotten on board the Ebon Egg. If the five deities of Ashfar send the Player Characters here, then they also offer to send the rest of the Assembly along with them.

Last of the Ennead: Any members of the Ennead who survive this far attempt to destroy the Player Characters once and for all. Any members of the Assembly who are present help the Player Characters, especially Bodiless Ao, who takes unseemly delight in ripping the Ennead's souls from their bodies.

The Wall of Blackness

There is motion at the edge of the sandy island. Black spheres emerge from the darkness and vanish back into it, like bubbles. These are *spheres of annihilation* being called spontaneously into existence from the Dark. *Spheres* appear every 2d6 minutes and remain manifest, never coming further than 10 feet across the shoreline, for 1d4 rounds. A character who approaches closely enough can attempt to control one.

Anyone who explores the edges of the island and makes a successful Spot check (DC 30) notices a small heap of white bones, for which see below.

The Bones by the Shore

These bones are so very ancient they have begun to turn to powder. The little skeleton lies with one arm outstretched, its finger bones touching the wall of darkness before you. Though the bones are crumbling, it is still possible to discern the identity of the creature they belong to. After all, you have seen such skeletons many times in the past.

These are the bones of a goblin.

Above, something within the immensity of the Dark draws itself together into a roughly humanoid form. It roars, and the sound is simultaneously as deep as a lion's roar and as shrill as an eagle's shriek. It is hard to tell the shape of the thing, as it is a blackly shimmering mass of energy, but for a moment you think you see something stooped, skinny and leering beyond it in the darkness.

The final secret of the Dark is now revealed, if the Player Characters have the wits to piece it together. A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 50) or Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 50) gives the answers if the players have not already worked it out for themselves.

If they remember the very first encounter of *The Drow War, Book One: The Gathering Storm*, they may recall that the first adversaries they faced at the Tump were shadow creatures that resembled goblins. This was much more significant than it seemed at the time, for the reasons given below.

Information: The Origin of the Dark

The deity-like creature called the Dark, which has been responsible for everything the Player Characters have opposed up to this point, is an articulation of the original darkness beyond creation. The darkness was not always articulate. The planar dark matter that surrounds the multiverse is not in itself sentient and does not have a specific agenda. The story of how it came to incarnate is untold and not even the wisest of sages knows it. No amount of Bardic Lore will uncover *this* story. However, once the Player Characters are in the presence of the Mind of the Dark, they can cast *legend lore* or *vision* spells to find out the truth:

While the multiverse unfolded in the midst of the darkness and gods played their games of creation, the darkness itself lay quiescent beyond. Nobody paid attention to it. To reach it was a pointless effort, to explore it a futile endeavour. There was nothing at all there.

Even without a mind, the darkness experienced a form of emotion, in ripples like waves of gravity that crossed the limitless gulf of its presence. It knew only what the void knows: an aching hunger for a sense of self. Unlike the Stars, each of which has a centre, a focus, a discrete identity, the Dark was nothing but a great nothingness. This was unbearable to it. Nature abhors a vacuum and even the Dark craved a self.

This craving went unsatisfied for countless millennia, while within the involuntary embrace of the darkness, the multiverse continued to expand and diversify like bubbles of light in black liquid. The more the multiverse burned with reality, the more the darkness shrank back from it, trying to rally itself around a focal point. There was none. Without even the tiniest particle of dust, the oyster could not begin to form a pearl.

As the Dark was wholly without substance, it had no basis for a self. Having nothing within itself to draw upon, it had to bring something in from outside, something that it could use to give itself an identity. The craving manifested itself as temporary holes in creation, little momentary cracks through the planes that formed and sealed over as the darkness quaked and heaved.

On the world of Ashfar, primitive humanoids fought with one another. Only the elves and the dragons had achieved any civilisation worth the name. The dragons played above the mountains, too young to hate one another, and the elves began to build wooden dwellings in the forests of Shallenoi. Humans were little more than an unusually intelligent species of humanoid which had learned to use weapons more sophisticated than those of the orcs and bugbears.

It was nothing but bad luck that drew Krugnaz the goblin into the cave. He had been wounded in a tussle with some worg-riders from a rival tribe, cut off from his warband and left without a safe place to rest up. A flint arrowhead was embedded in his right calf and he could not tug it out.

He hobbled over the ridge of rock, dragging his wounded leg behind him, and let himself drop down on the far side. On impulse he looked behind him and saw a cavern entrance, oddly dark despite the bright sunlight. He did not remember seeing the cave mouth on his previous travels through the region but he was not concerned: it seemed a gift from the gods. It did not smell of wolf or bear, so he scurried into it. The next thing he knew he was tumbling through darkness, landing on his aching hands and knees on a beach of white sand before an infinite black wall.

Krugnaz staggered to his feet, wincing at the pain in his leg, and looked around him. His simple brain was not able to make any sense of what had happened. He was hungry, in pain and lost. There was nothing to be seen but sand and darkness, with no cave in which to curl up.

The darkness intrigued him despite his pain and hunger. It seemed to call to him. He loped towards it, leaving tiny footprints in the white powder. He hesitated for a moment – the universe held its breath – then he reached out and touched the black wall.

The soul of the goblin instantly vanished into the darkness, quick as a feather caught up in a gale. His empty body fell, its arm still dangling in the black. Around the invisible, terrified soul of Krugnaz gathered wisps of darkness, bearing him up like clouds. His brutal, malicious, selfish goblin nature infused the eager darkness, giving it identity, giving it life. In the first rush of self-knowledge, the darkness forgot that it had borrowed this soul in order to give itself an identity. As far as it was concerned, it was *this soul, and it had always been.*

The terror faded as awe began. He was no longer confined to an absurd microscopic body. He was nonexistence incarnate. He could see infinite planes through his shadowy, clawed hands.

The darkness still knew what the void knew – hunger, craving and emptiness – but now this was blended with the nature of a frightened goblin in pain, transfigured in an instant of annihilation. The petty little evils of Krugnaz became infinite. The pain of his crippled leg with the arrow buried in it became the pain of a void tormented by the presence of a multiverse within itself. The darkness had not been evil, but when it merged with Krugnaz and took on his goblinesque characteristics, evil became fundamental to it.

A goblin had become a god.

Krugnaz had become the Dark.

Still feeling a need to rest and heal, the Dark drifted within itself, growing stronger and more defined. For aeons it did nothing but exist. Its own existence was still a thing of amazement to it. Finally it knew that the time was right. It understood hate. It wanted to crush that which was opposed to it. It was darkness; it must drag down and devour the light.

The Dark reached out through the planes to challenge the Stars. It chose its champions, a race of creatures that shunned light and prized the darkness. Into the best of them it poured its essence, rendering their souls immortal.

On Ashfar, the Black Titan arose with a heart of tenebrium. The drow mustered around it. Thus the first Equinox of the Heroes began.

The Final Conflict

The Player Characters must enter the blackness and venture into the Dark. The conditions beyond the wall are identical to those on the Negative Material Plane for all creatures other than the Starborn.

Any Non-Player Characters who attempt to enter the Dark suffer a massive drain of life force – with the exception of Bodiless Ao, who is not about to enter the Dark until the Player Characters have destroyed the Mind and its guardian (see below). They are also attacked by *umbral blots* until they are either destroyed or forced back onto the island. For this encounter, the Player Characters are on their own.

Umbral Blot: Medium construct; CR 32; HD 57d10 +120; hp 433; Init +18; Spd fly 90 ft. (perfect); AC 40, touch 20, flat-footed 30; Base Atk +42; Grp +42; Atk +42 melee touch (5d6 plus disintegrating touch, disintegrating touch); Full Atk +42 melee touch (5d6 plus disintegrating touch, disintegrating touch); SA disintegrating touch, vortex; SQ blindsight 200 ft., construct traits, fast healing 10, planar travel, resistance to acid 30, cold 30, electricital damage 30, fire 30, sonic 30, spell resistance 44; AL N; SV Fort +19, Ref +29, Will +29; Str 10, Dex 30, Con –, Int 14, Wis 30, Cha 30.

Skills & Feats: Hide +62, Listen +52, Move Silently +62, Sense Motive +43, Spot +52, Survival +43; Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Epic Prowess (x3), Epic Skill Focus (Hide), Epic Skill Focus (Listen), Epic Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Epic Skill Focus (Spot), Epic Toughness (x5), Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Skill Focus (Survival), Stealthy, Superior Initiative, Track.

Disintegrating Touch (Ex): Any material object that comes into contact with an umbral blot is immediately disintegrated unless it succeeds at a Fortitude saving throw (DC 38). A character or object that has been disintegrated by an umbral blot disappears completely, leaving behind not even dust to mark its passing. Those who make a successful saving throw still take 5d6 points of damage from the disintegrating touch. Likewise, weapons or objects that save take a like amount of damage. Attended or held objects save with the same bonus as their owners. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Vortex (Ex): Normally, an umbral blot insulates itself somehow from the air around it, otherwise it would perpetually be at the center of a howling wind-storm. If it chooses, instead of allowing the air to bend around it, the blackball can suspend this insulation, causing a sudden rush of wind to pour toward the blackball from all directions. This vortex sucks all the air from a 30-foot-by-30-foot-by-30-foot region in a single round, creating a sudden influx of air in its direction. All flying or floating creatures within 30 feet of the umbral blot who fail a Reflex saving throw (DC 38) are swept along with the wind into contact with the blot. Nonflying creatures within 30 feet who fail a Reflex saving throw (DC 19) are pulled into contact with the umbral blot. Contact with an umbral blot could lead to disintegration, as noted above. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Spell Immunities (Ex): In addition to the spells that an umbral blot is immune to because of its construct traits, it is immune to *disintegration* spells and variations thereof.

Planar Travel (Ex): An umbral blot can fold space at will, allowing it to use *ethereal jaunt, dimension door, greater teleport* or *plane shift* at will as a standard action.

The umbral blots are globes of non-being similar to *spheres of annihilation.* Their function here is to keep the Dark free from life forms that would contaminate it. These particular umbral blots will not attack the Starborn, as the starlight within their bodies repels them. They will, however, attack any non-Starborn entity that enters the Dark. There are 1d3 blots in attendance upon the Mind of the Dark at any given time.

As the Player Characters step over the boundary, their bodies become partly transparent, and a faint glow can be seen burning within the heart of each. This is their Starborn nature, the essence of the stars they incarnate, sustaining them in the void of night. This aura keeps back the *spheres of darkness*, which can be seen hovering at the periphery.

The darkness through which you move is older than anything in the universe. It was here aeons before the first of the planes was willed into being. It has always been here, surrounding the realms of the manifest, unseen and unknown to all but a few and it will be here when the last of the planes has collapsed into chaos.

There is a sound of wings beating. Terrible red eyes glow through the veils of endless black. You know that you are not alone. The

creature that rises before you is like an angel in form but changed, horribly changed. Its wings are as black as obsidian, and its face is twisted with madness and cruelty. It looks at you as if it knows you.

'Why do the Stars stoop to disturb the Dark? Who are you, that you presumptuously come before my master so? It is too late to sue for peace. The planes groan in travail; the cracks that presage catastrophe already run through Creation. The worlds will be broken down into seething chaos and remade, forged as they should have been! A new universe, a dark universe, balanced and peaceful, woven from cool shadow and midnight skies without the pestilential presence of light to disturb its dreams!'

The creature is (or once was) Tuvellan the Firecrowned, the angel who set forth from Heaven to make contact with the Dark and try to make peace with it. Instead the angel was corrupted. The long journey exhausted him and drove him to the brink of madness. When his mind finally made contact with the Dark, black waves of energy soothed his pain and lifted the burden of duty from him. Drifting in the blackness, sustained by the mind of the Dark itself (which knew a potential pawn when it saw one), he gradually surrendered to unreason. He became a Seraph of the Profane (see Appendix 3: New Monsters), casting himself as the chosen herald and grand vizier of the Dark.

As the winged thing rants, you catch sight of something beyond it. It is a sphere of smoky, glassy material. Within it is a huddled form, something small and shrivelled. You know with utter certainty that this, somehow, is the Dark itself. This is the mind with which it thinks.

The dark angel glares at you. 'You are cancers within the womb of night. I am the right hand of the void. I am the anointed of the new dispensation. Lo, I obliterate you; I cast you down from the firmament into the Pit, there to perish as the sparks that fade into the black! Let it begin now!'

With that, he charges the Player Characters and attempts to destroy them all.

Tuvellan is the final challenge the Player Characters face. He, rather than the mind of the Dark, is the climactic opponent. He attempts as best he can to prevent the Player Characters from reaching the sphere.

The Mind: Within the glassy sphere is the smoky, incorporeal soul of the goblin Krugnaz, the current mind of the Dark, who has served as such for the past four thousand years. The sphere has Hardness 20 and 500 hit points. Krugnaz has only one hit point and an Armour Class of 10. He can be destroyed with a single decisive blow, so long as the weapon used can affect incorporeal creatures.

Death of the Mind: If the Player Characters manage to destroy Krugnaz, a terrible wail like the voice of a million keening banshees tears through the void.

The Dark feels emptier than ever, more *desolate* than ever. In the place of Krugnaz is a shifting blot of blackness, invisible except to those with the power to see magical auras or use *true sight*. This is the Dark reaching out for a new mind.

If Tuvellan is still alive when Krugnaz is slain, he becomes a babbling maniac and attacks without any kind of reasoned plan, lashing out at whatever is nearest. When Tuvellan and Krugnaz are both destroyed, the Games Master should proceed to the section below.

The Destroyer Destroyed

Is it over?

Something is unfinished. There is something still left to do. You feel a force pulling at you, desperate. Instinctively, you know what it is.

The Dark is calling to you. It no longer has an ego, a nature, a way to be anything other than nothing. The evil, petty mind that was all that it had before is gone. It wants to be. *It has to take a new soul into itself, to give it identity, to give it meaning.*

And you know that all you have to do is to step into the space where the sphere was.

The Player Characters do not have to accept the Dark's request. They should, though, be well aware that if they do not, in time something else will. The Dark grabbed a goblin soul when it blindly groped for an identity. If that happens again, it will be a disaster. Furthermore, there are Non-Player Characters quite willing to take on the role of something akin to a deity, especially Jasmeera or Tarzi An'Drasta.

If any Player Character takes on the indescribable responsibility of becoming a god and steps into the space, the light from the star within him steadily fades to nothing and his body becomes smoky and transparent. In the next instant the seething black-on-black image of the character appears, somehow totally distinct against the void, as vast as a Titan. He has become the Dark and it has become he.

From now on the nature of the Dark will be modelled on that character's own nature; greedy or generous, passionate or logical, evil or good. The Dark is able to do one thing immediately should it so choose, and that is to right the imbalance of the planes. With a minimum of effort, it can draw the unstable planes back into alignment, bringing the planequakes to an end and ensuring that the multiverse is, for now, safe once again.

The Dark may also send the remaining Player Characters home to Ashfar if they choose, or to any plane that they care to mention. Their work here is well and truly done.

Thus ends the last of the Drow Wars.

Twist in the Tail: Carpe Noctem

The following twist is recommended if the Player Characters still have some fight left in them after confronting the Dark.

Bodiless Ao knows the truth of the Dark's identity. His desire to eradicate it is quite genuine but he is not motivated by a desire to save the multiverse at all. He has deduced that if the current manifestation of the Dark is destroyed, there will be a vacant position (as it were) in the order of things. Once the Krugnaz-Dark is gone, Ao rushes into the black wall to become the *new* Dark.

A demilich mind as the focal point of the Dark is potentially much, much worse than a goblin mind. Bodiless Ao does, however, have one distinct advantage. He does not want to destroy the multiverse. He would much rather have the adoration of the drow and abide forever outside Creation playing games with its creatures. His first act is therefore to undo the damage to the planes and put the multiverse back into balance.

This is still a victory for the Player Characters. The multiverse has at least been saved. That should be some consolation, as a demilich-deity is a whole new nightmare to contend with.

Appendix 1: The Eschatonic Scripts

This fragmentary text is included as a reference for the Player Characters, purely for flavour and for the fun of it. It contains clues, red herrings and portentous material to make the journey towards the final confrontation with the Dark all the more atmospheric. They should discover the *Scripts* early on in the adventure, most likely as a result of research undertaken during the events of Planequake.

History

Any Player Character can recall this information with a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 25), Knowledge (history) check (DC 25) or Bardic Lore check (DC 25). Note that this is the history of the *Scripts*, not the *Scripts* themselves. To access the *Scripts*, a character must actually possess a copy.

The *Eschatonic Scripts* are a collection of scraps of prophecies assembled into one volume by persons unknown. The first instance of the *Scripts* appearing together in one transcribed collection appears to have taken place in Kandang in the year 1848, when the compilation was discovered in an unopened library of the Dragon-Kings. In an attempt to improve the world's opinion of the country, the monarchs of Kandang allowed several roving bards and curious wizards supervised access to their libraries. These students made copies of the *Scripts* for their own uses, sometimes adding comments and interpretations that varied from the tentative to the declamatory.

The *Scripts* are composed of four sections. The oldest of these, the so-called *Quatrains of Anak Xul*, date from the time before the first Equinox of the Heroes and are widely believed to refer to the events that took place in that Equinox. They are thus discharged prophecies, though modern speculators never tire of finding new meanings for them.

The *Sayings of Good Mother Fubbage* are the most urbane of the *Scripts*, resembling the prattle heard in fortune-tellers' huts the world over. Versions of the *Sayings* are repeated as folk wisdom in most of the eastern nations of Ashfar.

The most respected section is the *Cryptic Mutterings of Thuz*. Wizards invest more significance in this section than any other; no doubt the fact that the author was a wizard himself accounts for this. Thuz was a definite historical figure, a wizard of Jehannum. His evil and power were such that he was the *de facto* ruler of Jehannum for a century and a half; his servant, a strange humanoid creature with long grey body hair called Yarnak, acted as his emissary and was commonly called the Hound of Thuz. Only age put an end to Thuz's evil. Following his demise, his tower was torn down and even the bricks were smashed to fragments. The fate of Yarnak is not known.

The most recently authored section is the *Vision of Septimus Jessop*, the rantings of a common peasant who was taken for a prophet. His conviction was such that many nobles as well as commoners were persuaded to take his words seriously; it was one such noble who provided a scribe to take down Jessop's words as he spoke them. Jessop originally began by uttering prophecies of doom to come, as prophets typically do, but rapidly distinguished himself by prophesying the means that could be taken to ensure oneself a place in Heaven.

Jessop's prescriptions originally involved unremarkable measures such as regular prayer and allowing one's hair and beard to grow in defiance of fashion, but Jessop's cult became steadily less popular and more hardcore as the requirements for salvation became more extreme. Emphasis was placed upon the mortification of the flesh and the denial of comfort. Nobles who had previously embraced Jessopism at a time when everyone else was doing it were not willing to enter Heaven if the cost of doing so was bathing in manure and applying sheep ticks to one's body parts. The whole Jessop cult was wiped out when the cottage it occupied fell in following an infestation of beetles. All that now survives is the *Vision*.

Jessop's prophecy, though short, caused mass hysteria the last time there was an eclipse of the sun, as an increasing number of people took this as the 'seventh sign' to which Jessop refers, although the world failed to end.

The Scripts

A good copy of the *Eschatonic Scripts* can be had for 80–100 gold pieces from a good bookseller in a major city. Although the book is inexpensive compared to other items, it is sufficiently scarce that only a major city is likely to have it. Alternatively a Player Character can expect to find a copy in any arcane library worth the name.

The Quatrains of Anak Xul

The lamps of Heaven tumbled down, burning still;
Fire and force shall suffice to stymie the gorgon's breath.
Three times the tyrants rise, three times they fall.
Upon the fourth, the heart shall burst and break.

I see a tower like a shadowed man,
Higher than hills and castles he shall walk.
Battening on blood of heroes. His the fist
That topples my proud race.

When shadow turns on shadow, black on black,
When White holds Black in final check and mate,
Then shall a greater hand in spite descend
To overturn the chequered board of worlds.

After bright stars have nailed down the night
A deeper doom shall face a brighter sky;
Hell shall arise, breaking forth in flame
And Heaven's trumpets sound the final fray.

The tryst is forged on a world not this world,
Brith's folly soon shall bear its final fruit;
An unclean wedding, swift to the fouler feast
Breeds further foulness within, awaiting its hour.

The Cryptic Mutterings of Thuz

In the midst of many storms I see a table, where the wicked and the wise dine together.
I against my enemy; my enemy and I against the stranger; me, my enemy and the stranger against the devouring unknown.
Bone above, bone beneath, and bone shall heal the hurt.
The colours are many, but the light is one.
The crimson hells and the azure skies shall feud, yet those in the midst shall join together to hold back the night.
As the diamond yields only to the touch of the diamond, so does a great evil yield only to a great evil.
All turns with the turning of the Wheel.
Even as the corrupt renounce their corruption, so too shall the pure become apostate to their purity.
Betrayal seethes in the heart that seems most warm, even as the worm writhes in the hottest dung.
The craftsman despises not the saw for its cruel teeth, nor does the blacksmith hate the fire for its cruel heat. Yet wood and iron alike shall curse the hand that works them.
When chaos reigns and all around are filled with doubt and wrath, he shall prosper who heeds the youth that bears great age in its hands.
The evil genius is no less a genius; the heroic fool is no less a fool.
Good without evil is like a steeple without a church; it wavers and cannot stand. Evil without good is like fire without fuel; it shall consume itself and perish.
Evil does not deal in false hope. Good has a monopoly on it.

The Sayings of Good Mother Fubbage

When the Final Days draw near,
When the End of All is here,
One shall sweat and one shall sing,
One to stones of sorrow cling,
One shall steal a kingly crown,
One shall tear a prison down,
One shall sail the damned bark
Unto the shores before the dark;
Sure as moths devour the silk,
Sure as thunder sours the milk.

Never did a man rejoice to tread upon a thorn;
Never did the appleseed bring forth an ear of corn;
Never was a castle built all out of rotten wood;
Never did an evil deed bring forth a deed of good.

If wizards never had walked the land
To work their wonders with word and hand,
Nor whittled a wand from an elder tree,
Then dragons children's toys would be;

And goblins, giants and ogres all
But shadows cast on a nursery wall.
So bless the wizard and treat him well,
And show respect to every spell.

Trust the fire to burn you, and trust the snow to chill,
Trust a dog to fetch and trust a cat to do its will,
Trust the merry jug of wine to fuddle up your brain,
But never trust a turncoat, lest he turn his coat again.

One a prince in sackcloth dressed,
One a child with bounty blessed,
One a Star in blood and bones,
One beset with sighs and groans,
One as black as midnight's heart,
One a fiend of double part.

A sinful nation shall arise
With steeples to assail the skies;
The demons loos'd to roam the earth,
The angels baffled for a birth,
While men and women all folorn
Await the coming of the dawn.
The world then at an end we'll see
In nineteen hundred and ninety-three.

The Vision of Septimus Jessop

The angel came before me once again, bearing a crown of flame upon his head and a trumpet that was also a sword, and this he did say: Ye shall know that the last days are come when the signs are sent unto you, and ye shall know the signs thus. Seven are there.

The first sign is the tearing of the Heaven like unto a hempen cloth.
The second sign is the howling of many beasts, in alleys of blood.
The third sign is the shattering of realms, unseen and yet heard, past the veil of the clouds.
The fourth sign is the rage of a dead mother at her dead child.
The fifth sign is the repentance of the fallen.
The sixth sign is the return of the tyrant of cinders and flame, that the world might be tormented by fire.
The seventh and the last sign is the sphere of brilliant day, eclipsed by the sphere of night.

Note for the Games Master: *The Cryptic Mutterings of Thuz*

The demilich Bodiless Ao is one and the same being as Thuz, the former tyrant of Jehannum and author of the *Cryptic Mutterings*. He produced those 'prophecies' purely so that in attempting to work with them, people would help him without knowing it.

For example, the *Cryptic Mutterings* urge the reader to place his trust in 'the youth that bears great age in its hands'; that is, in a child carrying an ancient skull. Other prophecies point the same way, such as 'bone above, bone beneath and bone shall heal the hurt'. One even implies that the heroes will have to side with evil if they are to win: 'As the diamond yields only to the touch of the diamond, so does a great evil yield only to a great evil'.

The idea is to give the reader the impression that in the time of the Apocalypse, normal rules do not apply and one must make allies out of former enemies. Trusting the demilich may actually be the right thing to do. Naturally Ao will use all his power to confirm this impression.

Ao has been planning his strategy carefully for more than a thousand years. He intends to become a god, or more than a god, but he cannot do it on his own; he needs the help of others. Nobody is going to help a demilich achieve even more power if they know that this is what they are doing. Hence the prophecies, which Ao can ingeniously and effectively 'interpret', thus manipulating the whole group while increasing his credibility.

It occurred to Ao long ago that the best way to ensure that a prophecy works to one's advantage is to write the prophecy oneself. Human beings have a habit of accepting prophecies as if they had arisen spontaneously from a neutral point of view. Nobody suspects the prophet of engineering events to suit himself. Of course it is best if a prophecy is old, as the older a prophecy is the more authority it has. This is not a problem if one has patience. To a lich, a couple of thousand years is an acceptable amount of time to wait.

Appendix 2: Constellations

Each of the Starborn is the incarnation of the energies of a single star. These stars are parts of constellations which determine the types of energy concerned and the benefits that are conferred upon those who are born under them. The players should each choose a birth sign from the list below. Note that more than one player can choose the same sign, as each sign contains multiple stars.

As the year progresses, each of the constellations appears on the horizon in turn. The months are named after the twelve signs, so that the year begins with the month of the Great Wolf and ends with the month of the Watchman. There is a rough correspondence between the sign and the activity of the month in peasant communities; for example, the Month of the Reaper corresponds with harvest time.

The Benefits of the Signs

Each sign has two benefits that a Starborn born under the sign can draw upon. One (and only one) of the benefits of a given sign can be invoked once per game session. As the benefit is a manifestation of fate, it takes the form of a luck bonus to a stated check. A result of 'automatic success' gives the *minimum* result necessary to indicate success, no more. The ability can only be used when the skill check DC is 20 or less.

These benefits cannot be used when the character is within 150 feet of a member of the Host or a fragment of the Abyssal Altar, as the energies of the Dark prevent the auspicious currents of the stars from reaching their avatars.

1. The Great Wolf

A wolf's head bares its teeth, with a single star forming the gleam in its eye. The Wolf represents the threat of starvation during the cold, dark months of winter, but is also a positive sign, as he devours the old year and its woes.

Those born under the Wolf's sign are usually practical, down-to-earth people with a tendency to be harsh, having contempt for the soft and weak. They are fiercely protective of their few true friends and allies.

Benefit: +1 luck bonus to any single attack roll or +1d4 additional damage to any damage roll.

2. The Unicorn

The Unicorn's star-tipped horn, reminiscent of the icicles of winter, breaks the horizon as the snowdrops break the cold earth. It is as cold, bright and pure as the ice but brings the promise of renewed life.

People born under the Unicorn are enthusiastic, keen and direct. They can become obsessive; when they want something, they stop at nothing to get it. They detest circumlocution and petty debate when there is action to be taken.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to Armour Class for one round or +10 ft. increase to movement speed for 1d4 rounds.

3. The Delver

The earth has now softened after the winter frosts. The symbol of a man (or, as some say, a dwarf) digging the ground represents the sowing time, when the farmers plant seeds in the soil. A star gleams at the tip of his shovel.

Those born under this sign are often curious, inquisitive people, with a desire to look below the surface and find out the secrets of others.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to a single Fortitude saving throw or automatic success on a single Strength-based skill check.

4. The Wave

Heavy rains and floodwaters follow the full thaws of spring. The Wave is the symbol of the rushing waters and signals the beginning of the season of safe sea voyaging.

Those born under the Wave tend to be graceful, empathic people, though like the waters they can be deceptive and shallow.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to a single Reflex saving throw or automatic success on a single Charisma-based skill check.

5. The Satyr

With spring in full bloom, the blood runs hot in man and beast alike. The Satyr is the sign of animal energy, fully restored to life. This is an exultant sign, representing joy in one's own strength and the freedom to exercise it.

Those who have the Satyr as their birth sign enjoy life to the full. They can sometimes annoy people by taking nothing seriously, treating life as one big joke. When they are in the mood to be cruel, they can be viciously sadistic in the name of their own fun.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to a single Will saving throw or temporary hit points (+1 per character level) lasting five rounds.

6. The Rose

The Rose is the beauty of the blossoming earth made manifest in the heavens, though its thorns also symbolise treachery and cruelty for its own sake.

The people of the Rose are often physically attractive and able to manipulate those around them by subtle cues. They make good leaders, whether of heroes or of villains.

Benefit: +3 luck bonus to any single initiative check or automatic increase in Non-Player Character reaction by one stage upon initial contact (see the Diplomacy skill).

7. The Firedrake

Firedrake is the old word for *dragon*, specifically one who breathes flame. This sign symbolises the searing heat of summer. It also calls to mind the dim memory of the time when dragons would visit the towns of men to receive tribute; this would always be in the seventh month, as the herds and crops were at their fullest then, allowing for the greatest plunder.

Those born Firedrakes are difficult to read; they conceal deep thoughts behind placid faces and can smoulder with resentment for years before taking action. They are usually rational and calm, though they can break into furious fits of passion when provoked or stirred.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to Armour Class for one round or +1 luck bonus to Armour Class for three rounds.

8. The Reaper

The Reaper appears at the end of summer, the figure of a tall man with a sweeping scythe. He stands for hard work, the fruits of labour and the reward (or punishment) that waits after death. This is an auspicious sign to be born under, signifying the power to conquer whatever lies before one.

Those born under the Reaper's scythe are strong-willed, sometimes to the point of bullheadedness. They do not give up easily.

Benefit: +1 luck bonus to any single attack roll or +3 luck bonus to a single critical check (made after a critical threat has already been scored).

9. The Flail

The Flail is both the tool that threshes the barley and the weapon of the same name. As the Flail rises in the sky, the earth beneath is scourged by wind and rain. Summer is over and the hardships of the darker months begin.

Those whose sign is the Flail are meticulous and focused. They are very thorough in their investigations and tend to stick doggedly to a task until it is achieved. They make excellent researchers; many wizards are born under this sign.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to a single Fortitude saving throw or automatic success on a single Intelligence-based skill check.

10. The Spinner

The Spinner is one of the more mysterious signs: a huge spider with eight closely-clustered stars for eyes. The common interpretation is that the spider stores up food and weaves webs, reflecting the work of stockpiling and clothspinning that happens at this time. Other interpretations see the Spinner as the sign of magic, weaving the web of fate and trapping the unsuspecting with charms.

Spinners are patient people by nature, who enjoy making plans and hatching plots. They can bide their time for a long while before taking quick, decisive action.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to a single Reflex saving throw or automatic success on a single Wisdom-based skill check.

11. The Spectre

The eleventh month is often said to be one of ill omen. The animals are slaughtered on its first day, in the blood-harvest; by the end of the month the bitter cold of the season has usually claimed its first victims. The sign of the Spectre is a grim reminder of death, which also has its place in the order of things. It also recalls the belief that the souls of the dead are believed to revisit the world during this month to make sure they have not been forgotten.

Those born under the sign of the Spectre seem to be older than their true ages, as if they recall some previous life.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to a single Will saving throw or +2 luck bonus to any skill check.

12. The Watchman

Sixteen stars form the shape of a man holding a lantern aloft. His lantern is the brightest star in the sky, the symbol of hope through the winter months.

Characters born under the Watchman make natural leaders. They have a nigh-unshakable confidence in themselves which radiates to those around them. This leadership ability makes them superb teachers, battle leaders or even criminal bosses.

Benefit: +2 luck bonus to any other character's skill check or +1 luck bonus to any other character's saving throw; the character must be within line of sight.

Appendix 3: New Monsters

Abn Sukta

Small Outsider
Hit Dice: 14d8+84 (147 hp)
Initiative: +9
Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares)
Armour Class: 22 (+9 Dex, +3 natural), touch 19, flat-footed 13
Base Attack/Grapple: +14/+10
Attack: Scalpel +15 melee (1d4/19–20)
Full Attack: Scalpel +15/+10/+5 melee (1d4/19–20)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: —
Special Qualities: Repair undead, telepathy 100 ft.
Saves: Fort +15, Ref +18, Will +18
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 28, Con 22, Int 20, Wis 28, Cha 12
Skills: Appraise +22, Craft (alchemy) +22, Craft (taxidermy) +22, Heal +26, Knowledge (arcana) +22, Knowledge (nature) +22, Knowledge (the planes) +22, Knowledge (undead) +22, Move Silently +26, Profession (embalmer) +26, Search +22, Spot +26, Use Magic Device +18
Feats: Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Mobility, Run
Environment: Any
Organisation: Solitary or troupe (2-4)
Challenge Rating: 7
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: By character class
Level Adjustment: —

These odd little creatures are the Surgeons of the Dead, professional embalmers and experts in all matters relating to undead existence. They are neither evil nor undead themselves. They are simply bred to a purpose.

The Abn Sukta originated on the plane commonly called *Necropolis* but have been found on other planes, almost always in the employ of powerful undead lords. They go about their tasks with tireless precision, resenting any interruptions. They rarely resort to physical combat.

Abn Sukta resemble dwarves with blue-black skin and the heads of jackals. They have large stomachs and long, agile fingers. They never speak aloud, preferring to communicate by telepathy. Even this is nonverbal and consists of images instead of words.

Repair Undead (Ex): The Ibn Sukta can perform ingenious surgery on undead creatures, restoring them to health without the need to use magic. With five minutes' work, an Ibn Sukta can heal an undead creature of a number of hit points equal to the result of its Heal check.

Banesteed

Large Magical Beast
Hit Dice: 4d10+20 (42 hp)
Initiative: +3
Speed: 60 ft. (12 squares)
Armour Class: 18 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +6 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple: +4/+13
Attack: Hoof +8 melee (1d4+5)
Full Attack: 2 hooves +8 melee (1d4+5)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft..
Special Attacks: —
Special Qualities: Blind, planar travel
Saves: Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +5
Abilities: Str 20, Dex 17, Con 21, Int 8, Wis 18, Cha 14
Skills: Jump +9, Listen +10
Feats: Blind-Fight, Run[B], Skill Focus (Listen)
Environment: Temperate plains or Astral Plane
Organisation: Solitary or pair
Challenge Rating: 3
Treasure: —
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: 5–8 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment: +4

These creatures originally hail from the kingdom of Arkossa on a plane now destroyed. They resemble horses with hollow pits where their eyes should be. They were created by means of dark magic which tried to fashion a breed of horse that would bear its rider from plane to plane, reducing the need for magic such as *plane shift*. The magic went awry, deforming the horses' skulls and robbing them of sight.

With the destruction of their home plane, only seven banesteeds are known to exist. These are the mounts of Hygrave's Huntsmen.

A banesteed is completely blind. Left to itself, it can do little other than graze and wander.

Blind (Ex): Banesteeds cannot see. Their Blind-Fight feat allows them a slightly better chance to strike an opponent, but they attempt to flee from dangerous situations rather than fight at all. Unlike other creatures, they do not suffer a speed penalty for blindness, as their condition is inherent.

Planar Travel (Su): A banesteed can travel between the planes as a free action and usually does so in the middle of a leap; it seems to jump out of one world and land in the next. It travels as if by a *plane shift* spell, with the only difference being that it can only transport itself and its rider, along with any gear it carries. It may travel between the planes three times per day. The steed has an instinctive understanding of the planes and can find its way to any plane that it has visited before, but it cannot travel to any plane that it has not visited previously, with the exception of the Astral Plane, which is its preferred environment.

Training a Banesteed: A competent handler can train a banesteed to obey his directions so that he acts as the steed's eyes and ears. Obviously this means nurturing the banesteed until it absolutely trusts the rider, so much so that it will gallop ahead at full speed with no idea of what is in front of it simply because the rider says to do so. Training a banesteed for riding or combat takes double the usual time and the Handle Animal check DCs are increased by +6.

Banewrack

Banewracks are the mindless, mangled, partially mutated remains of vampires who have failed to endure the transformation process intended to create an elect vampire. They are red-eyed and staggering, their bones stretched and distorted. Banewracks are essentially elect vampires permanently trapped in warped versions of their ghastly alternate forms. The teeth in their mouths are as jagged as broken bottles, slicing and tearing the creatures' mouths as they mumble nonsense to themselves. Banewracks often have bone nodules protruding through their skin, one arm much longer than the other, huge lower jaws or vestigial limbs.

Creating a Banewrack: 'Banewrack' is an acquired template that can be added to any humanoid vampire (referred to hereafter as the base creature). A banewrack has all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: Size is increased by one category.

Armour Class: A banewrack gains an additional +10 natural armour bonus from its bony growths.

Attack: The banewrack gains a bite attack as a secondary attack which deals damage as appropriate for a creature one category larger than its size. It loses the ability to fight with manufactured weapons as well as natural weapons.

Full Attack: The banewrack usually attacks with two slams and a bite.

Damage: As the base creature, readjusted for the new size.

Special Attacks: The banewrack loses any special attacks it gained from the vampire template, except as noted below.

- Blood Drain (Ex): The banewrack's blood drain attack now deals 2d6 points of Constitution drain on a successful pin. On each such successful attack, the banewrack gains 15 temporary hit points.
- Energy Drain (Su): The banewrack retains this ability. It gains ten temporary hit points for each negative level bestowed.
- Improved Grab: The banewrack gains the Improved Grab special attack. If it succeeds at a bite attack, it can automatically attempt a grapple as a free action.

Special Qualities: The banewrack loses any special qualities it gained from the vampire template, except as noted below.

- Damage Reduction (Su): A banewrack has damage reduction 15/silver, bludgeoning and magic. A banewrack's natural weapons are treated as magic weapons for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.
- Fast Healing (Ex): A banewrack heals five points of damage each round so long as it has at least one hit point. If reduced to zero hit points in combat, it is destroyed.
- Resistances (Ex): A banewrack has resistance to cold 25 and resistance to electrical damage 25.
- Turn Resistance (Ex): A banewrack has +8 turn resistance.

Feats: The banewrack loses any feats that it no longer qualifies for, or that depend upon the use of manufactured weapons.

Ability Scores: The banewrack's Intelligence and Charisma scores are reduced to 6. Its Strength ability score is increased by +10.

Challenge Rating: As the base creature +1.

Duplicate Entity

A creature that has been duplicated by a mothering mass is a perfect physical copy of the original as it was at the moment when the mass' needlemites sampled its blood. It is produced with all scars and other distinguishing marks intact. The mothering mass can make nonmagical copies of any gear that the original creature possessed, but these are not as perfect an imitation as the creature itself and do not pass a close inspection. A Spot check (DC 20) notices that the gear is cruder looking than it ought to be.

Creating a Duplicate: To create a duplicate entity, the Games Master should retain the original's physical and mental ability scores and apply the pseudonatural template to the creature's base type. The duplicate gains the additional powers of semblance and telepathy (see below).

The duplicate creature is nothing but a pseudonatural version of the *type* of creature that the original was. For example, a duplicated 24th level human fighter is merely a pseudonatural human with some additional abilities. It has access to the original's memories but has none of its experience levels, spells or special abilities.

Semblance: Unlike regular pseudonatural creatures, a duplicate entity has three forms: the original creature, a tentacled version of the original creature and a formless writhing mass of tendrils. When in the first form, the creature cannot use its tentacle attacks. This duplicate form is a perfect physical replica of the original creature. It can reproduce all of its mannerisms, speech patterns and other distinguishing behaviours. This makes its imposture almost impossible to detect. A duplicated creature has an effective +30 racial bonus to Disguise and Bluff checks that relate to impersonation of the original.

Telepathy (Su): All duplicate entities can communicate telepathically with the mothering mass that birthed them and with each other, with no limit on the range.

Elect Vampire

Elect vampires are created in a dark ritual which draws upon the power latent in the Ebon Ring of the Carnifex to work horrible transformations upon the undead. A humanoid form is ideal for mixing with humans, an animal form perfect for making one's way in the natural world; what is usually missing is a warlike guise for those vampires who love to drink the blood gushing from a torn-out throat instead of draining it from seduced victims. Elect vampires gain a new form more suited to rending their victims asunder. The Baneliness confers this honour upon those of her vampiric minions who, having shown promise, have then passed through the testing level. A vampire who survives becomes an elect vampire. One who fails either dies or becomes a banewrack.

Creating an Elect Vampire: 'Elect Vampire' is an acquired template that can be added to any humanoid vampire (referred to hereafter as the base creature). An elect vampire has all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: Size is increased by one category in ghastly form.

Speed: When in ghastly form, the elect vampire gains a fly speed of 60 ft. (average manoeuvrability).

Armour Class: An elect vampire gains an additional +7 natural armour bonus from its leathery hide.

Attack: The elect vampire gains a bite attack as a secondary attack which deals damage as appropriate for a creature of its modified size.

Full Attack: The elect vampire usually attacks with two slams and a bite while in ghastly form.

Damage: As the base creature, readjusted for the new size.

Special Attacks: The elect vampire gains the following special attacks while in ghastly form.

- Blood Drain (Ex): The elect vampire's blood drain attack deals 2d4 points of Constitution drain when in ghastly form.
- Improved Grab: The elect vampire gains the Improved Grab special attack in this form. If it succeeds at a slam or bite attack, it can automatically attempt a grapple as a free action, draining blood if the grapple is successful.

Special Qualities: An elect vampire retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains those described below.

- Damage Reduction (Su): An elect vampire in ghastly form adds bludgeoning damage to the damage reduction it already has.

- Fast Healing (Su): The elect vampire's fast healing improves to ten when in ghastly form. It is still forced into gaseous form when reduced to zero hit points.

- Ghastly Form (Su): As well as its usual alternate form, the elect vampire gains a second alternate form. This resembles the vampire in its humanoid state with greatly elongated canine teeth, stretched limbs, a leathery hide and membranous wings sprouting from its shoulders. This ability is similar to a *polymorph* spell cast by an 18th level character except that the elect vampire does not regain hit points for changing form and must choose from among the forms mentioned here. While in its alternate form, the elect vampire loses its dominate ability and cannot cast spells with verbal components (as the enlarged teeth prevent clear speech), but it gains the statistics and special abilities noted here.

Feats: An elect vampire gains the Multiattack and Flyby Attack feats as bonus feats when in ghastly form.

Ability Scores: An elect vampire in ghastly form gains a +4 increase to Strength. This is in addition to the increase for its additional size.

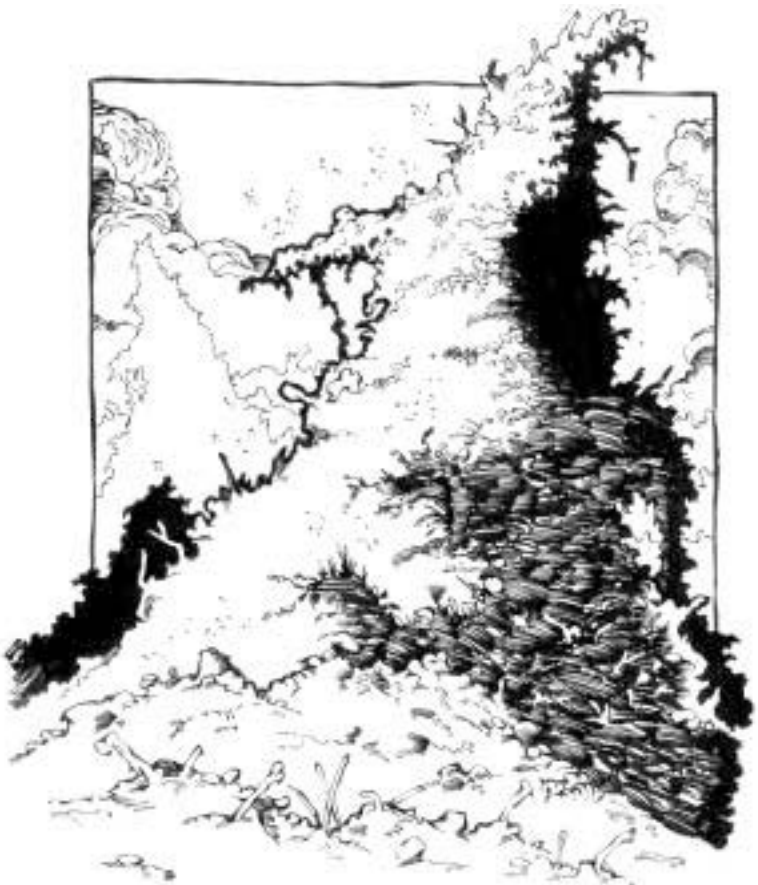
Challenge Rating: As the base creature +1.

Garbage Colossus

Colossal Construct (Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 100d10+80 (630 hp)
Initiative: +2
Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares) (cannot run)
Armour Class: 30 (-8 size, -2 Dex, +30 natural), touch 0, flat-footed 30
Base Attack/Grapple: +75/+103
Attack: Club +79 melee (6d6+18) or slam +79 melee (4d6+12) or thrown object (weighing 10 tons or less) +65 ranged (4d6+12)
Full Attack: Club +79/+74/+69/+64 melee (6d6+18) or 2 slams +79 melee (4d6+12) or thrown object (weighing 10 tons or less) +65 ranged (4d6+12)
Space/Reach: 30 ft./30 ft.
Special Attacks: Disease, insect shroud, stench, stomp
Special Qualities: Construct traits, damage reduction 15/epic, fast healing 10, immunity to magic
Saves: Fort +33, Ref +31, Will +33
Abilities: Str 35, Dex 6, Con —, Int 1, Wis 11, Cha 1
Skills: Jump +16
Feats: Improved Initiative
Environment: Any
Organisation: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 26
Treasure: —
Alignment: Neutral
Advancement: 101–170 HD (Colossal)
Level Adjustment: —

There is a saying: 'On the world of the Sklavadok, the trash takes *you* out!' This clumsy joke hints at a horrible reality. There are towering shapes at the heart of the Trashgardens which lurch and stumble about, surrounded by the maniac drone of millions of insects. These are the garbage colossi, faceless constructs formed from hundreds of tons of rubbish: broken weapons, smashed pots and plates, cart wheels, rotten fruit, mouldy books, yesterday's porridge, street sweepings, old clothes, dead animals, rubble, rags and bones and broken furniture, all crammed together and enlivened by a skittering stream of insect life that flows through the colossus like blood. Cockroaches swarm over a garbage colossus' surface with furious purpose.

A garbage colossus's natural weapons are treated as epic for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.



Antimagic Field (Ex): A garbage colossus constantly generates an antimagic field in a 100-foot radius. The field is an invisible barrier that is impervious to most magical effects, including spells, spell-like abilities and supernatural abilities. Likewise, it prevents the functioning of any magic items or spells within its confines except for the colossus' own supernatural abilities. This effect is otherwise identical to an *antimagic field* cast by a 25th level caster.

Construct Traits: A garbage colossus is immune to mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns and morale effects) and to poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects. It cannot heal damage, though fast healing still applies. It is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain or energy drain. The colossus is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is destroyed when reduced to zero hit points or less; it cannot be raised or resurrected. The colossus has 60-ft. darkvision.

Disease (Su): The garbage colossus' blows seethe with infection from the thousands of tons of trash that make up its body. Creatures struck for damage must make a Fortitude save (DC 60) or contract a terrible ailment that cramps muscles and leads to almost instant paralysis. This is a supernatural disease with an incubation period of 1d3 rounds. It deals 1d6 Strength and 1d6 Dexterity damage each round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Insect Shroud (Su): A garbage colossus is constantly affected as if by a *crown of vermin* spell (epic spell) cast by a 100th level caster. As per the spell, the colossus may completely suppress the aura of insects as desired. A garbage colossus' insect shroud constantly replenishes itself at a rate of 200 vermin per round (unlimited duration). When vermin die off either from being slain or from dealing damage to another creature, the aura does not permanently collapse, even if all the vermin are slain or if all 1,000 vermin deal their damage in one round. As soon as any vermin are replenished, they participate normally in the *crown of vermin* effect. The full press of insects can be avoided via a Reflex save (DC 55). The shroud of insects grants the garbage colossus concealment against attacks (20% miss chance). The insects partake of the colossus' magic immunity. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Magic Immunity (Ex): A garbage colossus is immune to all spells, spell-like abilities and supernatural effects except as follows. A *repel vermin* or *cure disease* spell slows it (as the *slow* spell) for one round with no save, while *insect plague* hastens it as per the *hasten* spell.

Stench (Ex): A garbage colossus reeks like nothing else in the multiverse. It stinks of the putrefying offal and detritus of a thousand worlds. All creatures with a sense of smell who come within 400 feet of the colossus must make a Fortitude save (DC 60) or be nauseated (unable to attack, cast spells, concentrate on spells or do anything else requiring attention except for a single move or move-equivalent action per round). Those who succeed on their saves take a -4 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls, saves and skill checks for the next 2d6+4 minutes. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Stomp (Ex): As a full-round action, a garbage colossus may stomp upon any adjacent foe (that is, any within the area it threatens). This special attack uses the colossus' Dexterity modifier instead of Strength and its attack roll modifier is +65. If successful, the stomp deals double damage (8d6+24) and pins the victim until the colossus chooses to release him.

Mothering Mass

Gargantuan Outsider (Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 40d8+640 (820 hp)
Initiative: +3
Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares)
Armour Class: 20 (-4 size, -1 Dex, +15 natural), touch 5, flat-footed 20
Base Attack/Grapple: +40/+61
Attack: Tentacle +46 melee (2d8+9)
Full Attack: 2 tentacles +46 melee (2d8+9) and bite +44 melee (3d6+4)
Space/Reach: 15 ft./15 ft.
Special Attacks: Blood drain, clone, dominate, emit swarm, engulf, improved grab, spell-like abilities, telepathic field
Special Qualities: All-around vision, fast healing 26, spell resistance 36
Saves: Fort +42, Ref +25, Will +30
Abilities: Str 28, Dex 8, Con 42, Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 24
Skills: Bluff +50, Diplomacy +50, Intimidate +50, Knowledge (nature) +43, Listen +49, Search +43, Sense Motive +47, Spot +49
Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (tentacle)
Epic Feats: Epic Fortitude, Epic Reflexes, Epic Will, Fast Healing (2)
Environment: Any
Organisation: Solitary or nest (one mass plus 1–4 duplicate creatures)
Challenge Rating: 24
Treasure: —
Alignment: Chaotic neutral
Advancement: 41–60 HD (Colossal)
Level Adjustment: —

These creatures are called into being when misguided wizards attempt to meddle with the divine powers of creation. A mothering mass is a grotesque, heaving pulp of pink flesh with half-formed body parts emerging and being sucked back in, as if creatures are trying to fight their way out. It dribbles a white milky substance from nodules dotted around it. This foul stuff is nutritious and is used to keep its spawn fed. The mass itself feeds by slowly dissolving the organic material around it.

The creature is *life* in its most basic organic sense, run riot. Its only desire is to be fecund and produce more and more life. However, it cannot do this on its own, as it does not contain the principle of generation. All that it can do is make botched travesties of creatures that already exist. Even then it needs to sample their blood and tissues before it can create duplicates. It does this by means of its needlemites.

The mass sends forth needlemites to harvest blood and other organic matter from a creature. This matter then acts as the material component for what is essentially a version of the *clone* spell (see below). The mass breeds the new creature within itself, gestating it in mere minutes.

A mothering mass absorbs a creature's memories when it absorbs the blood sample. It can thus speak any language spoken by a creature whose blood it has taken. To communicate, it forms a temporary head.

Mothering masses are patient and subtle. They send their duplicate creatures to dispose of the originals, then have them go back into their communities and find more ideal subjects for replication. A mothering mass can take over whole villages or even towns in this way. In its derangement, it honestly thinks it is doing the right thing by taking over.

All-Around Vision (Ex): The creature's constant growth of eyes in places all over its body give it all-around vision. It cannot be flanked.

Blood Drain (Ex): If the mothering mass achieves a pin, it can drain its target for 2d4 points of Constitution per round. The blood is drained through thorn-like growths in the creature's skin.

Clone (Su): The mothering mass can produce duplicate entities (see below). This creature must be at least one size category smaller than the mass, which must also have received a blood sample from the creature to be duplicated, collected either by means of a needlemite or by its own tentacles. The gestation process takes one round per three Hit Dice of the creature being created. The mass cannot retain control over more than 40 Hit Dice of duplicate entities at any one time.

Dominate (Su): The mothering mass can use a standard action to psychically dominate a creature, usually creating further paranoia and confusion as to whether the creature is a duplicate or not. Anyone the mass targets must succeed on a Will save (DC 37) or fall instantly under the mass's influence as though by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 24th). The ability has a range of 30 feet. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Emit Swarm (Su): The mass can emit a swarm of needlemites (see below) from its body. It can emit a new swarm after 1d4 rounds but can never have more swarms under its control than it has points of Charisma ability score modifier. A typical mass can thus control up to seven swarms.

Engulf (Ex): The mothering mass can haul a grappled target of Huge size or smaller into its sticky body. This frees up the tentacle to attack other targets. While it holds a target in its body, it takes a -20 penalty on grapple checks against that target and is not considered grappled itself; the creature it grapples does not lose its Dexterity bonus to Armour Class, still threatens an area and can use its remaining attacks against other opponents. By hauling multiple targets into its body, the mass can grapple several creatures at once while leaving its tentacles free.

Improved Grab (Ex): If the mothering mass hits with a tentacle attack, it can immediately attempt a grapple check as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *confusion* (DC 21), *contagion* (DC 21), *cure serious wounds*, *modify memory* (DC 21). The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Telepathic Field (Su): The mothering mass emanates a telepathic detection field that extends 30 feet out from its body in all directions. Any creature entering this field must make a Will save (DC 37). If it fails the save, the mothering mass can read its surface thoughts (as if by a *detect thoughts* spell) for as long as it remains in the field. A creature who successfully saves is immune to that mothering mass's telepathic field for the next 24 hours. The mass uses this ability to identify hostile creatures and thwart enemy tactics. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Needlemite Swarm

Diminutive Outsider (Extraplanar, Swarm)
Hit Dice: 12d8+27 (81 hp)
Initiative: +10
Speed: 5 ft. (1 square), fly 40 ft.
Armour Class: 20 (+4 size, +6 Dex), touch 20, flat-footed 14
Base Attack/Grapple: +12/—
Attack: Swarm (3d6 plus blood drain)
Full Attack: Swarm (3d6 plus blood drain)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks: Blood drain, burrow, distraction
Special Qualities: Damage reduction 10/magic, darkvision 60 ft., immune to weapon damage, low-light vision, resistance to fire 10, swarm traits
Saves: Fort +10, Ref +14, Will +11
Abilities: Str 1, Dex 22, Con 14, Int 1, Wis 13, Cha 9
Skills: Listen +9, Spot +9
Feats: Ability Focus (burrow), Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Toughness
Environment: See Mothering Mass
Organisation: Solitary or cloud (2–4 swarms)
Challenge Rating: 10
Treasure: —
Alignment: Chaotic neutral
Advancement: —
Level Adjustment: —

Needlemites are tiny metallic insects with sharp proboscises, from which they derive their name. A single needlemite is approximately half an inch long. The mothering mass emits them from orifices in its body.

Unless they are fighting to defend the mothering mass, needlemites do not usually attack a target for longer than it takes to drain blood. They then fly back to the mass and transfer the blood into it, updating its set of available duplicates.

Blood Drain (Ex): Creatures that suffer damage from the needlemites' swarm attack must make a Fortitude save (DC 18) or suffer 1d3 points of Constitution drain. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Burrow (Ex): Needlemites attacking to kill (rather than to sample blood for the mothering mass) can burrow under the skin and try to crawl towards the victim's vital organs. A swarm can make a burrow attack as a free action against any creature within its space. When a swarm makes a burrow attack, it expends up to 20 hit points, which are deducted from its total. These are the mites that have left the swarm to burrow into the target. The number of mites that successfully burrow into the target equals 20 minus the target's natural armour bonus. The target can feel the mites squirming in his body. Three rounds after the burrow attack, the target must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 11 plus total number of mites that have burrowed into the target) or die as the mites tunnel into his vital organs. Whether or not the attack kills the target, the mites die and are no further threat. *Remove disease*, *remove poison* and *repel vermin* have no effect, nor do protections against death magic, but a *heal* or similar spell expels the mites from the victim's body before they reach the vital organs. The burrow attack is not effective against creatures that are not vulnerable to critical hits. The save DC is Strength-based.

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with a needlemite swarm in its space must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 18) or be nauseated for one round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Porcelain Dandy

Medium Construct
Hit Dice: 45d10+20 (267 hp)
Initiative: +21
Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)
Armour Class: 47 (+13 Dex, +24 natural), touch 23, flat-footed 34
Base Attack/Grapple: +33/+40
Attack: *+10 keen rapier* +56 melee (1d6+17/15-20) or *+10 keen spiked chain* +56 melee (2d4+20/19-20)
Full Attack: *+10 keen rapier* +56/+51/+46/+41 melee (1d6+17/15-20) or *+10 keen spiked chain* +56/+51/+46/+41 melee (2d4+20/19-20)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft. (10 ft. with spiked chain)
Special Attacks: Sneak attack +10d6
Special Qualities: Blindsight 120 ft., construct traits, immunity to acid, intrinsic weaponry, magic immunity, resistant to cold 50 and electrical damage 50, vulnerability to sonic, weaponbreaking
Saves: Fort +15, Ref +28, Will +16
Abilities: Str 24, Dex 36, Con –, Int 18, Wis 13, Cha 28
Skills: Appraise +17, Balance +37, Bluff +33, Diplomacy +33, Hide +37, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +28, Listen +21, Move Silently +41, Perform (dance) +38, Search +28, Sense Motive +14, Spot +14, Tumble +37, Use Rope +25
Feats: Blinding Speed, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Disarm, Improved Feint, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Mobility, Power Attack, Run, Spring Attack, Superior Initiative, Weapon Finesse
Environment: Any urban
Organisation: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 27

Treasure: —
Alignment: Always lawful neutral
Advancement: By character class
Level Adjustment: —

These exotic, graceful, fast-moving constructs are found in the courts of exceptionally powerful kings and emperors. They serve the joint functions of major domo, spy, assassin, manservant or even concubine. As a royal court is often a place of intrigue and rumourmongering, it is useful to have an ally who combines the virtues of utter loyalty and complete discretion.

There are a finite number of these creatures in existence. They were created long ago, to serve an unknown purpose; the secrets of their creation are long lost. Those that have survived have been discovered in old tombs alongside their former masters or buried amid the clutter in ancestral attics.

A porcelain dandy serves one, and only one, master. When that master is killed, the dandy enters the service of the first person to claim it. The dandy instinctively knows whether its master is alive or dead.

A porcelain dandy resembles a human figure made from gleaming white ceramic, with a smooth oval instead of a face (this material resembles porcelain only in its appearance; it is tougher than iron). In keeping with its name, it will often dress in the most flamboyant clothes available. Purple frock coats, broad gold-buckled shoes, high wigs and ebony canes topped with diamonds are favoured. Female dandies exist and are much rarer. These dress in black or scarlet ball gowns with high, stiff necks.

A dandy never speaks aloud. It communicates with mime and exaggerated gestures or, if necessary, with written messages in florid script. It always carries pen, ink and parchment in case this should be necessary.

The creature's favoured class is rogue. Its weapons are treated as epic for the purposes of overcoming damage reduction.

Intrinsic Weaponry (Ex): The porcelain dandy's *+10 keen rapier* and *+10 keen spiked chain* are part of its body, though they do not function as natural weapons. The rapier is extruded from the wrist of the right arm, and the spiked chain from the wrist of the left. It can manifest or withdraw these items as a free action, and it gains a +4 bonus against disarm attempts. The weapons do not function if removed from the dandy.

Immunity to Magic (Ex): A porcelain dandy is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below:

- A magical attack that deals sonic damage deals double damage against the dandy, which cannot resist it, though it is allowed a saving throw.

- A magical attack that deals fire damage heals 1 point of damage for each 3 points of damage the attack would otherwise deal. If the amount of healing would cause the dandy to exceed its full normal hit points, it gains any excess as temporary hit points. For example, a porcelain dandy hit by a *fireball* gains back 6 hit points if the damage total is 18 points. A porcelain dandy gets no saving throw against fire effects.

Sneak Attack (Ex): This functions like the rogue class ability of the same name.

Weaponbreaking (Ex): The porcelain dandy's body is phenomenally tough and pulses with subtle vibrations. Weapons have a chance to shatter against it. Any weapon that successfully strikes the porcelain dandy must also make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20) or be shattered into pieces.

Sentinel of the Great Gate

Colossal Construct (Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 40d10+80 (300 hp)
Initiative: +0
Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares) (cannot run)
Armour Class: 32 (–8 size, +30 natural), touch 2, flat-footed 32
Base Attack/Grapple: +30/+56
Attack: *+2 flaming greatsword* +34 melee (6d6+17 plus 3d6 fire) or slam +32 melee (4d6+10) or thrown object (weighing 10 tons or less) +22 ranged (4d6+10)
Full Attack: *+2 flaming greatsword* +34/+29/+24/+19 melee (6d6+17 plus 3d6 fire) or 2 slams +32 melee (4d6+10) or thrown object (weighing 10 tons or less) +22 ranged (4d6+10)
Space/Reach: 30 ft./30 ft.
Special Attacks: Searchlight, stomp, *zone of truth*
Special Qualities: All-around vision, construct traits, damage reduction 10/epic and adamantine, immunity to magic, true seeing
Saves: Fort +13, Ref +13, Will +16
Abilities: Str 30, Dex 10, Con –, Int 8, Wis 16, Cha 10
Skills: Spot +33, Listen +33
Feats: —

Environment: Any
Organisation: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 22
Treasure: —
Alignment: Neutral
Advancement: 41–80 HD (Colossal)
Level Adjustment: —

These towering, tireless creatures stand watch at some of the most desolate places in the universe. They are created by magical rites similar to those that produce golems and colossi. They are typically associated with mercanes, who guard the secrets of their manufacture. According to legend, the gods placed them at the gates of the lower heavens to prevent presumptuous mortals from trying to enter.

Sentinels have only one purpose, and that is to guard. Many sentinels still watch over places long forgotten by those who created them. Obedient to their last instructions, they watch and wait, smiting those who approach too close. As servants, sentinels are prized for their Intelligence, which though low is much greater than that of other constructs. They can understand complicated instructions and speak to creatures.

A sentinel resembles a giant humanoid made from black stone. It has four faces, fashioned so that each face shares both of its eyes with the neighbouring faces. This gives it all-around vision. It carries a vast dark sword that is wreathed in blue fire.

All-around vision (Ex): A sentinel can see in all directions. It cannot be flanked.

Antimagic Field (Sp): A sentinel constantly generates an *antimagic field* in a 100-foot radius. The field is an invisible barrier impervious to most magical effects, including spells, spell-like abilities and supernatural abilities. It prevents the functioning of any magic items or spells within its confines except for the sentinel's own supernatural and spell-like abilities. This effect is otherwise identical to an *antimagic field* spell cast by a 25th level caster.

Construct Traits: A sentinel is immune to mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns and morale effects) and to poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects. It cannot heal damage, though fast healing still applies, and is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain or energy drain. The sentinel is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is destroyed when reduced to zero hit points or less; it cannot be raised or resurrected. It also has 60-ft. darkvision.

Immunity to Magic (Ex): A sentinel is immune to all spells, spell-like abilities and supernatural effects except as follows. *Blindness/deafness* temporarily *slows* it as if by the spell for one round with no save; it has no effect upon the sentinel's sight or hearing.

Searchlight (Su): A cabochon in the sentinel's forehead emits a brilliant beam of light with a range of 300 feet; this illuminates an area 30 feet in diameter. It can redirect this beam as a free action. Invisible creatures the beam shines upon are outlined as if by a *glitterdust* spell, making them partially visible. Any creature caught in the area of illumination must make a Will save (DC 30) or be immobilised. The creature can speak and act normally and can attack and defend itself, but it cannot voluntarily move out of its space. An immobilised creature may make a new Will save at the start of its turn each round to throw off the immobilisation effect. If the searchlight moves away from the creature, it can move again. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Spell-like Abilities: At will – *detect thoughts*, *discern alignment*, *scorching ray*, *shout;* 3/day – *sunray.* The caster level is 18th; the save DC is 10 plus the spell level.

Stomp (Ex): As a full-round action, a sentinel may stomp upon any adjacent foe (that is, any within the area it threatens). This special attacks uses the sentinel's Dexterity modifier instead of Strength and its attack roll modifier is +22. If successful, the stomp deals double damage (8d6+20) and pins the victim until the sentinel chooses to release him.

True Seeing (Su): A sentinel continually sees with *true seeing* as per the spell (caster level 18th).

Zone of Truth (Sp): A sentinel is constantly surrounded by a *zone of truth* as per the spell (caster level 18th).

Skills: A sentinel has a +10 racial bonus on Spot and Listen checks.

Seraph of the Profane

Large Outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)
Hit Dice: 66d8+330 (627 hp)
Initiative: +15
Speed: 50 ft. (10 squares), fly 150 ft. (good)
Armour Class: 50 (-1 size, +7 Dex, +21 natural, +13 profane), touch 29, flat-footed 43
Base Attack/Grapple: +66/+79
Attack: *+10 dancing greatsword* +85 melee (3d6+23/17–20) or *+7 composite longbow* (+5 Strength bonus) +79 ranged (2d6+12 plus slaying/19–20/x3)
Full Attack: *+10 dancing greatsword* +85/+80/+75/+70 melee (3d6+23/17–20) or *+7 composite longbow* (+5 Str bonus) +79/+74/+69/+64 ranged (2d6+12 plus slaying/19-20/x3)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks: Aura of death, damnation's flames, spell-like abilities, voice of thunder
Special Qualities: Abomination traits, damage reduction 15/epic and good, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, immunity to acid, cold, fire and petrification, protective aura, regeneration 20, resistance to electrical damage 20, spell resistance 42, tongues
Saves: Fort +46, Ref +42, Will +44
Abilities: Str 28, Dex 25, Con 20, Int 23, Wis 25, Cha 30
Skills: Concentration +65, Craft or Knowledge (any five) +66, Diplomacy +79, Escape Artist +36, Hide +61, Listen +69, Move Silently +69, Search +59, Sense Motive +69, Spellcraft +69, Spot +69, Survival +19 (+21 following tracks), Use Rope +27 (+29 with bindings)
Feats: Cleave, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Critical (longbow), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Rapid Shot, Run, Track, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Focus (longbow)
Epic Feats: Blinding Speed, Epic Fortitude, Dire Charge, Overwhelming Critical (greatsword), Overwhelming Critical (longbow), Superior Initiative
Environment: An evil-aligned plane
Organisation: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 32
Treasure: —
Alignment: Always evil (any)
Advancement: 67–76 HD (Large); 77–90 HD (Huge)
Level Adjustment: —

Of all the powers of evil, none is so strong or so steeped in misery as that which was once a force for good. When a paladin turns to the path of darkness, he becomes a blackguard. When an angel falls from grace and embraces evil, it may become a seraph of the profane.

Some sages say that these creatures do not, *cannot* exist. Celestial powers are good by definition. They are emanations of the upper planes, and as such they can no more change their natures than a compass can refuse to point north. Other scholars, who have uncovered shards of forbidden history and deciphered curious archaic accounts from lost civilisations, know that this is untrue. All things can change.

The process of corruption is not easy, nor is it common. It requires lengthy exposure to a source of profane energy of deity-like levels of power, which subtly changes the angel's very substance over time. The angel must also choose to renounce Heaven, with no hope of ever regaining it. When this decision is made, the angel is turned instantly to stone, feathers and all. Only its mind remains alive, brooding and reflecting on the abyssal secrets revealed to it, becoming a mad parody of itself. It remains in this petrified state for a hundred years until finally, with a shriek, the stone angel explodes and a new-made seraph of the profane rises from the sizzling fragments.

A seraph of the profane is a deep indigo in colour, with eyes of blazing scarlet. Wings like those of a black swan spread from its back. It holds a human skull in one hand and a sword of icy black steel in the other, shedding ultraviolet light.

A single seraph can destroy a whole city overnight. Where its shadow falls, life is extinguished. Images of the seraphs can be found in crumbling books of prophecy in which

they appear as heralds of the Apocalypse, sending waves of death across crowds numbering in the thousands.

A seraph of the prophane's natural weapons are treated as epic and evil-aligned for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction. Such seraphs wield corrupted versions of the *dancing greatswords* that they bore as angels, along with magical *composite longbows* that create any sort of *slaying arrow* when drawn.

Aura of Death (Su): The very presence of a seraph of the profane spells death to living things. As its black heart beats, it continually emits pulses of fatal force which function exactly as a *circle of death* spell does (caster level 30th) with the exception that creatures of 9 or more Hit Dice (or levels) are not immune to the effect. At the beginning of the seraph's turn, the *circle of death* pulses in a 40-foot-radius burst centred on the seraph. It slays 30d4 Hit Dice of creatures; those that make Fortitude saves (DC 53) are not affected. A seraph can extend the radius of its aura to 120 feet, but it must concentrate on this and cannot take any actions except move actions when doing so. When seraphs are sent to destroy cities, they broaden their auras of death and fly slowly above the dwellings, leaving the dead in their wakes. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Damnation's Flames (Su): When the seraph hits with a ranged touch attack – a ray of deep scarlet that it shoots from its eyes to a range of 400 feet – the target is held fixed in place while streaming flames explode from his eyes, mouth and fingers. Creatures struck by the ray burn, being dealt 10d8 points of fire damage and 6d8 points of profane damage each round until the ray is extinguished. In addition, they must make a Fortitude save (DC 53) or be paralysed for 1d8+10 rounds. The flames cannot be extinguished by normal water, and a *dispel* effect cannot remove them; it only suppresses them for 1d4+1 rounds as if the flames benefited from the Tenacious Magic feat. *Quench* puts the flames out if the caster succeeds at a *dispel* check (DC 31). A *wish* or *miracle* can extinguish the flames. Holy water also has a chance of extinguishing them; a caster level check (DC 31) must be made for any spellcaster who casts *bless water* against them. If successful, the flames are put out. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Rebuke/Command Evil Outsiders (Su): A seraph of the profane can rebuke or command evil outsiders as a cleric with the Planar Turning feat, with a level equal to the seraph's Hit Dice plus six.

Regeneration (Ex): Seraphs of the profane are dealt normal damage from good weapons, sentient weapons or otherwise living weapons.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *animate objects, bestow curse, commune, contagion, continual flame, dimensional anchor, fear, greater dispel magic, imprisonment, invisibility* (self only), *polymorph* (self only), *power word stun, speak with dead, summon monster VII, unholy smite, waves of fatigue*; 3/day – *blade barrier, earthquake, harm, mass charm monster, permanency, waves of exhaustion*; 1/day – *power word blind, power word kill, power word stun, prismatic spray, wish*. The caster level is 30th; the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Summon Pit Fiend (Sp): Five times per day, a seraph of the profane can *summon* a pit fiend. This is equivalent to a 9th level spell.

Voice of Thunder (Su): The seraph ordinarily speaks in a hoarse whisper, but when roused to anger it bellows in a voice like roaring tempests. Three times per day, a seraph can use its voice of thunder. The first time it does this, all creatures within 250 feet must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 53) or be paralysed for 1d4 rounds; all those within 90 feet are deafened for 2d6 rounds with no save. If it bellows a second time during the same encounter, all within 250 feet must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 53) or be dealt 3d6 points of Wisdom damage for 2d4 rounds. In addition, any Medium or smaller creature within 90 feet must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 53) or be thrown to the ground and be dealt 2d8 points of damage. The force of this thunderous bellow is so great that it deals 50 points of damage to any stone or crystalline object within 90 feet. Magic items and held or carried items can avoid damage with a Reflex save (DC 53). If the seraph bellows for a third time during the same encounter, all creatures within 250 feet suffer 20d6 points of sonic damage, with a Fortitude save (DC 53) allowed for half damage. In addition, any Medium or smaller creature within the 250-foot area of effect must succeed on a second Fortitude save (DC 53) or be thrown to the ground and be dealt 2d8 points of damage. Stone or crystalline items suffer damage as before, being dealt 150 points of damage. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Skirrith

Huge Aberration
Hit Dice: 30d8+330 (465 hp)
Initiative: +22
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 140 ft. (perfect)
Armour Class: 50 (-8 size, +14 Dex, +28 natural, +6 deflection), touch 22, flat-footed 36
Base Attack/Grapple: +22/+38
Attack: Tentacle +35 melee (1d8+8/19–20)
Full Attack: 6 tentacles +35 melee (1d8+8/19–20)
Space/Reach: 15 ft./15 ft.

Special Attacks: Attack mutability, blade frenzy, encase, leech enchantment, shard explosion
Special Qualities: Amorphous, armoured sphere form, damage reduction 10/adamantine and epic, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electrical, resistance to cold 25, resistance to fire 25, resistance to sonic 25, spell resistance 35
Saves: Fort +23, Ref +24, Will +30
Abilities: Str 27, Dex 38, Con 32, Int 20, Wis 36, Cha 24
Skills: Diplomacy +40, Escape Artist +47, Hide +39, Listen +46, Move Silently +47, Spot +46, Survival +46
Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (tentacle)
Epic Feats: Blinding Speed, Dire Charge, Improved Combat Reflexes, Superior Initiative
Environment: Astral plane
Organisation: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 24
Treasure: —
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: 31–60 HD (Huge), 61–90 HD (Gargantuan)
Level Adjustment: —

The *skirrith* or 'dreamblade' is a collection of flat diamond-shaped razor-edged scales around six inches across and half an inch thick, clustered together to form a column-shaped mass. The scales are silvery in colour and as hard as mithral. Each shard is in fact the shell of a single pulsing grey creature much like a clam. Prising open the shell to reveal the creature within is almost impossible, as the shells are seamless and incredibly resistant to damage.

The skirrith is a hive mind composed of multiple scale-creatures. These are each highly telekinetic, allowing them to hover in the air close to one another and generate a deflective field around the whole. The telekinetic fields continually attach, detach and reattach themselves as the skirrith moves around. The skirrith is thus in constant but orderly motion, as its body rotates and linked chain-like arms flail out from it.

The skirrith assumes different forms as convenience requires. The diamond scales tessellate, allowing the skirrith to pack them together tightly and form a wall, turn them outwards to become a spiked ball, or even form into a hollow sphere and enclose another creature. When attacking, it can bunch its scales together and form a smashing pseudopod, link them to create a whip-like slashing tentacle, or form them into a rigid spike and thrust with them. This allows it to carry out various special attacks as listed below.

Skirriths feed upon positive energy and can be found lingering near gateways to the Positive Material Plane, basking in the glow of power. They prefer to leech the magic from enchanted items, however, as it is a delicacy to them. They are menaces to astrally-projected travellers, as their slashing tendrils can sever such a traveller's silver cord. Should this happen, the skirrith seizes instantly upon the floating astral body and devours it.

Skirriths occasionally work for wizards and other planar voyagers who can assure them of a constant supply of energy. Their mutable nature allows them to act as bodyguards, assassins and even captors.

Attack Mutability (Ex): A skirrith can choose to inflict piercing, bludgeoning or slashing damage as it wishes. It must choose which option to use before attacking with a given tentacle. On a successful hit, the following additional effects apply:

- Slashing: The razor-sharp limb gouges a horrific wound in the victim that bleeds copiously, dealing 1d4+2 points of Constitution damage in addition to hit point damage unless the victim succeeds on a Fortitude save (DC 33). If the target of a slashing attack is an astrally-projected creature, the result of a failed save is the severance of the silver cord (and instant death) rather than Constitution damage. The save DC is Strength-based.

- Bludgeoning: The target of a skirrith's powerful smashing attack must make a Fortitude save (DC 33) or be stunned for 1d4+1 rounds. The save DC is Strength-based.

- Piercing: A target who is impaled by a skirrith's limb is ensnared as if by a harpoon, as the diamond-shaped scales splay out inside the victim's body. The skirrith may immediately begin a grapple check as a free action, as if using the Improved Grab special ability.

Amorphous (Ex): The skirrith's lack of a single form leaves it with no clear front or back. It thus cannot be flanked.

Armoured Sphere Form (Su): A skirrith can arrange its plates into the form of a sphere for optimal defence as a move action. It usually assumes this form when it has encased a creature it has been sent to abduct. When in armoured sphere form, the skirrith cannot make tentacle attacks or encase attacks, though it retains any creatures already encased. Instead it gains a slam attack (+22 melee, damage 1d8+14, reach 5 feet). In armoured sphere form, the skirrith's deflection bonus to Armour Class increases to +12.

In addition, the skirrith gains the benefit of spell reflection while in this form. The conjoined plates form a reflective surface that deflects all rays, lines, cones and *magic missile* spells. There is a 30% chance that any such attack is reflected back at the caster. If not, it is simply negated.

Blade Frenzy Form (Su): The skirrith may disengage its scales and whir each one on its axis, creating a region of whizzing blades that greatly resembles a *blade barrier* spell. It can enter this form as a free action. Any creatures it has encased are freed. While it is in this form, the skirrith cannot attack with its tentacles or encase opponents. It also loses its deflection bonus to Armour Class, as all the scales' telekinetic energy goes into spinning furiously.

To attack when in this form, the skirrith simply moves over a target. It must take a full-round action to do so. Any creature whose space is completely covered by the skirrith is subject to the blade frenzy attack. A creature whose space is only partly covered is also subject to the attack but gains a +4 circumstance bonus to its save against the blades and may make an attack of opportunity against the skirrith at a -4 penalty. Opponents who are completely overrun by the skirrith can attempt attacks of opportunity but take a -4 penalty if they do so; furthermore, attempting an attack of opportunity disallows a save against the blades.

The skirrith's blade frenzy deals 12d8 points of slashing damage to affected creatures, with a Reflex save (DC 39) allowed for half damage. The save DC is Dexterity-based.

Encase (Ex): A skirrith can cluster its scales around creatures, gripping them in an armoured cage made from its own body. A skirrith can attempt to encase a Large or smaller opponent by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent is dealt 4d8 points of damage per round, from either bludgeoning or piercing as the skirrith chooses; the skirrith can choose not to inflict this damage if it wishes. A swallowed creature can force its way out by making a successful grapple check or Escape Artist check, opposed by the skirrith's own grapple check; the skirrith gets a +10 bonus on its check to hold the opponent inside its body. Attempting to cut a way through the plates is futile, as the fluidity of the skirrith's form means that more plates move in to replace damaged ones. The only way to escape the creature is to pull the plates apart by force or worm one's way between them.

Leech Enchantment (Su): A skirrith feeds by draining power from magic items. It can only drain the enchantment from an unattended magic item or one that it currently holds. Artefacts are immune to its leeching ability.

The skirrith makes a special *dispel* check against the item's caster level to drain the enchantment, as if attempting to suppress the item's function. It takes a standard action to do this; the modifier to the *dispel* check is +20. If the *dispel* check is successful, the item's magic is drained. The skirrith gains temporary hit points based on the item's classification: 5 for a minor item, 10 for a medium item, 20 for a major item and 40 for an epic item.

Shard Explosion (Su): A skirrith can fire off several of its plates in a burst to keep foes at bay. It does not usually do this unless fighting for its life, as the attack damages it; plates fired more than two feet away from other plates are lost from the body mass, as the telekinetic fields that hold the entity together have a fairly short range. The skirrith can create an explosion of sharp scales that deals up to 20d6 points of piercing damage to all creatures within a 30-foot-radius burst, with a Reflex save for half damage (DC 36). Each d6 of damage dealt by the burst deals two points of damage to the skirrith, as it rips away its component pieces. The save DC is Constitution-based.

The Sklavadok: Garbage Men of the Multiverse

In a universe of many planes, strange races arise that take advantage of the inability of most creatures to travel from one plane to another. The mercanes are the best known of these: blue-skinned interplanar traders who profit from selling items that are common on one plane in places where they are rarer. Less well known and less well liked are the *sklavadok*.

The sklavadok know one thing better than any other race: rubbish. They are born in trash piles, live out their lives among the detritus of other races and know secrets far too distasteful for others to inquire into. They make their living by dealing with the trash that other races do not want to handle.

For most creatures on civilised planes such as Ashfar, waste is not too much of a problem. Such waste as there is tends to be organic and breaks back down into the soil. Occasionally the refuse from wizards' workshops contaminates a sewer or causes odd mutations, but generally magic does not present a waste-disposal problem.

On more outlandish planes, waste is much more of an issue. The limited living space on some planes causes garbage to pile up. Dangerous magical by-products and alchemical discharges have to be dealt with. Ravaging beasts of enormous size can be slain, but their carcasses still have to be disposed of, lest they become centres of pestilence or become zombies under the control of a necromancer.

Some hazards are smaller but more deadly. Cursed items, the remains of evil mages, keys that unlock things best left alone and similar perilous objects all present problems. Nobody wants them in their backyards, but nobody wants them to go missing either, for fear of even worse consequences. *Disintegrate* spells and the like can help to get rid of large amounts of matter, but many wizards and sorcerers resent being reduced to the status of garbage men. Evil artefacts often have legendary means by which they can be destroyed, such as being thrown into notable volcanoes or trodden under the feet of platinum dragons, but monarchs frequently have trouble finding anyone willing to go to the trouble; besides, if a group messes up, an artefact can easily find its way into the hands of evil.

Enter the sklavadok.

The sklavadok appear in cities that seem to be having waste-disposal problems. For modest fees, they offer to make the rubbish go away. They proudly boast that they can deal with any amount of mundane trash. More hazardous items such as evil artefacts, the ashes of legendary vampires, bottles with insane efreeti bound into them and so forth can also be removed, for higher prices. Customers can rest assured that these items are not simply chucked into nearby wells. Instead, the sklavadok build sealed storage bunkers – 'temporal cysts' – in private planes known only to them, bound by the secret magic that only they know.

The sklavadok offer a completely confidential and ethical service, or so they claim. They have established a reputation for honesty and reliability on several civilised worlds and have even allowed a few guided inspections of their bunkers. Even so, some courtly advisors are uncomfortable with their monarchs leaving powerful artefacts in the sklavadoks' care, claiming that these items should be destroyed in proper ways according to prophecy, not just indefinitely stashed out of sight.

Sklavadok Traits

All sklavadok possess the following traits.

- Immunity to poison and disease.
- Immunity to stomach distress. A sklavadok can never be nauseated by any effect.
- Resistance to acid 10, cold 10 and fire 10.
- +2 racial bonus on all Fortitude saves.
- +4 racial bonus on Appraise skill checks.
- +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks when in garbage-strewn areas.

Sklavadok Anchorite

Medium Outsider (Sklavadok)
Hit Dice: 36d8 (162 hp)
Initiative: +9
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)
Armour Class: 35 (+9 Dex, +1 natural, +15 insight), touch 34, flat-footed 26
Base Attack/Grapple: +36/+38
Attack: *+7 brilliant energy scimitar* +46 melee (1d6+9/18–20) and 2 rays +46 ranged touch (special)
Full Attack: *+7 brilliant energy scimitar* +46/+41/+36/+31 melee (1d6+9/18–20) and 2 rays +46 ranged touch (special)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Ray of annihilation, ray of binding, ray of burdening, ray of decrepitude, rebuke undead, spell-like abilities, spells, stench, *temporal encystment*
Special Qualities: Sklavadok traits, telepathy
Saves: Fort +20, Ref +29, Will +27
Abilities: Str 14, Dex 29, Con 11, Int 28, Wis 24, Cha 27
Skills: Appraise +48, Bluff +47, Diplomacy +51, Disable Device +48, Gather Information +48, Hide +48, Knowledge (arcana) +48, Knowledge (history) +48, Knowledge (the planes) +48, Knowledge (undead) +48, Listen +46, Move Silently +48, Profession (rubbish disposal) +46, Search +48, Spellcraft +52, Spot +46, Use Magic Device +48
Feats: Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (ray), Weapon Focus (scimitar)
Epic Feats: Blinding Speed (5), Spellcasting Harrier
Environment: Any urban, Astral Plane, Trashgardens
Organisation: Solitary, cabal (3 anchorites) or force (1 anchorite plus 1–3 harvesters and 3–18 tallymen)
Challenge Rating: 25
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Lawful neutral
Advancement: 37–60 (Medium)
Level Adjustment: —

The cryptic leaders of the sklavadok are the anchorites. They resemble tall, extremely skinny humanoids wrapped in tight coats, with fabric wound around their limbs and lower faces. They usually wear oversized hats with impractically wide brims. Only their blank white eyes can be seen. The rest of a sklavadok's body is covered up; even each long stick-like finger is carefully bandaged. There are six fingers on each hand.

Anchorites do not speak aloud. Instead they communicate in a sign language that only other sklavadok understand. They do not speak to outsiders. Most customers of the sklavadok do not even know that the anchorites are in charge and believe that the tallymen are the ones running the show.

Anchorites are masters of decay, withering and corruption, and are connected in some as yet unexplained manner to the flow of time. They see themselves as the ultimate destroyers of all things that have lingered too long in the world, whether piles of trash that have no further use, buildings that have stood unoccupied for too long or creatures that cling unnaturally to life. On those rare occasions when they do not or cannot destroy something, they seal it away in a temporal cyst, effectively removing it from further participation in reality.

Perhaps strangely, anchorites despise corporeal undead but have no quarrel with the incorporeal variety, and even employ them as servants. Those few sages who know enough about anchorites to study them have guessed that corporeal undead are hated because they keep physical remains unnaturally animated, and the anchorites are concerned with physical things.

Rays: An anchorite can use any two of its rays once per round. Each use is a free action.

Ray of Annihilation (Su): An anchorite can emit a sizzling black ray from the palm of its left hand which disintegrates creatures and objects it encounters. This functions much like a *disintegrate* spell, dealing 30d6 damage to the target. With a successful Fortitude save (DC 36), the target is dealt 8d6 damage instead. Creatures reduced to zero or fewer hit points by this effect are blasted into fine dust. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Ray of Binding (Su): An anchorite projects a pulsing blue ray from its right eye, enclosing the target in shimmering bonds. These have the effects of *dimensional anchor* and *hold person* spells simultaneously. The target can attempt a Will save (DC 36) to avoid the *hold* effect but not the *dimensional anchor* effect. If three anchorites all strike the same target with *rays of binding* in the same round, he suffers the effects of *temporal encystment* (see below). The save DC is Charisma-based.

Ray of Burdening (Su): An anchorite can send forth a milky beam from its left eye which massively increases the pull of gravity on the target. The target feels as if he has been laden down with invisible adamantine chains. A creature struck by this ray is treated as if carrying an additional item weighing 300 lb. The effect of this additional load depends on his Strength score; see the *PHB*. This burden cannot be dropped, though it can be targeted by *dispel magic*. Repeated uses of the *ray* stack, increasing the weight by

300 lb. each time but never causing physical harm to the target. The effect lasts for two minutes (20 rounds).

Ray of Decrepitude (Su): The anchorite can emit a ray of grey gloom from its bony right index finger that causes premature aging in the target. Each strike by the ray confers 1d4 temporary decades of age (10–40 years), causing the target to suffer from the negative effects of aging while gaining none of the positive effects. These unnaturally acquired years of age work similarly to negative levels. 24 hours after the magical aging is bestowed, the target makes a Fortitude save (DC 36) for each decade of accumulated age. If the save is successful, that decade of magical aging is removed with no harm to the target. If the save fails, the decade of aging is retained and becomes actual age. A *greater restoration*, *wish* or *miracle* spell can remove all decades of magically acquired age that a target has, so long as this is done before 24 hours have passed. Aging that has become permanent cannot be removed. A character who acquires more years of magical age than the maximum lifespan for his race dies instantly and shrivels to a skeleton, rising as a dread wraith under the control of the anchorite 1d4 rounds later. The ray does not affect characters who are immune to aging, such as high-level druids and most outsiders. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *mending;* 3/day – *displacement* (DC 21), *minor creation*, *plane shift* (DC 25), *spider climb*, *stinking cloud* (DC 20); 1/day – *demand* (DC 26), *teleport* (DC 23). The caster level is 14th; the save DCs are Charisma-based.

Stench (Su): A horrendous stench surrounds the anchorite. Any living creature (except sklavadok) within ten feet must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 28) or be nauseated for as long as it remains within the affected area and for 1d4 rounds afterward. Creatures who successfully save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. A creature who successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same anchorite's stench for 24 hours. A *delay poison* or *neutralise poison* spell removes either condition from one creature. Creatures who have immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Temporal Encystment (Sp): An anchorite's most potent means of dealing with a foe (or an object that needs to be disposed of) is to strike it with *temporal encystment.* To do this it must take a standard action and successfully touch the target, who is allowed a Will save (DC 36) to avoid the effect. Once an anchorite has attempted *temporal encystment*, it cannot do so again for 1d4 minutes. The effect resembles an *imprisonment* spell, except that the target is sent to a temporal enclosure cyst on the sklavadok home plane, the Trashgardens (see below) instead of a small sphere far below the earth's surface. As with *imprisonment*, a *freedom* spell must be used to free the target once he has been found. This is a difficult undertaking, as a typical temporal enclosure cyst is very hard to locate. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Three anchorites working together can also place *temporal encystment* upon a creature by striking it with three *rays of binding* in the same round. If this occurs, the last ray to strike the creature produces the *temporal encystment* effect and the target takes a -8 penalty to its Will save.

Turn/Rebuke Undead (Su): An anchorite can turn corporeal undead and rebuke incorporeal undead as a 14th level cleric.

Weapons: Anchorites form scimitar-like force planes from their own energy. These function as *+7 brilliant energy scimitars* in combat. If an anchorite dies, its weapons fade to nothing.

Spells: An anchorite casts spells as a 14th level wizard.

Spells prepared (4/7/6/6/6/5/4/3, save DC 19 + spell level): 0th – *detect magic, disrupt undead, read magic, resistance;* 1st – *charm person, detect undead, mage armour, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, shield, true strike;* 2nd – *alter self, detect thoughts, knock, locate object, magic mouth, shatter;* 3rd – *dispel magic* (2), *displacement, fireball, haste, shrink item;* 4th – *detect scrying, enervation, fear, hallucinatory terrain, resilient sphere, scrying;* 5th – *cloudkill, dismissal, false vision, major creation, telekinesis, transmute rock to mud;* 6th – *analyse dweomer, antimagic field, greater dispel magic, legend lore;* 7th – *banishment, discern location, horrid wilting.*

Sklavadok Harvester

Large Outsider (Sklavadok)
Hit Dice: 36d8+396 (558 hp)
Initiative: +12
Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares)
Armour Class: 38 (-1 size, +4 Dex, +25 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 34
Base Attack/Grapple: +36/+52
Attack: Slam +48 melee (1d8+12)
Full Attack: 4 slams +48 melee (1d8+12) and bite +46 melee (2d6+6/19–20)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks: Dig, rend, shatter object, shred armour, swallowing gate
Special Qualities: Damage reduction 20/epic, fast healing 8, immunity to disease and poison, mind blanking,

resistance to acid 30, cold 30 and fire 30, sklavadok traits, telepathy
Saves: Fort +35, Ref +28, Will +26
Abilities: Str 34, Dex 18, Con 32, Int 8, Wis 22, Cha 10
Skills: Appraise +4, Climb +24, Hide +13, Knowledge (the planes) +38, Listen +45, Move Silently +17, Profession (waste disposal) +45, Search +38, Spot +45, Survival +45
Feats: Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (slam)
Epic Feats: Dire Charge, Epic Fortitude, Epic Reflexes, Superior Initiative
Environment: Any
Organisation: Solitary, gang (1–4) or squad (2–8 plus 1–3 tallymen)
Challenge Rating: 20
Treasure: —
Alignment: Lawful neutral
Advancement: 36–72 HD (Huge)
Level Adjustment: —

A sklavadok harvester is basically a walking gateway back to the Trashgardens. Harvesters are large stockily-built creatures with no necks and bone domes with blinking yellow eyes instead of heads. These eyes are covered with glassy screens which make a harvester look like it is wearing goggles. A harvester's torso has a human-like mouth across it, which when opened reveals a gateway of spiralling blue lights. Surrounding the torso are four muscular arms.

Harvesters do the bulk of the sklavadok's garbage clearance. When a harvester sets to work, it equips itself with four shovels and scoops the trash into its mouth, transporting it directly to the Trashgardens. Each harvester has a 'node' where the trash that it eats falls through. Harvesters are not especially intelligent and can easily snatch up creatures that do not get out of the way fast enough, swallowing them and sending them to the Trashgardens with the rest of the refuse.

Harvesters do not usually attack to kill a living foe unless instructed to by a tallyman. Such creatures are swallowed instead, or grappled and pinned while the harvester calls telepathically for a tallyman to come. Harvesters destroy constructs, undead, plants and objects without hesitation, as they do not recognise such creatures as being alive.

Dig: Harvesters work at blinding speed with their shovels. A harvester can clear out a ten-foot cube of loose material such as rubble, garbage or soft earth in one minute. Burrowing through an equivalent amount of solid rock takes ten minutes, but for this the harvester must be armed with picks.

Mind Blanking (Su): When engaged in simple repetitive activity, a harvester can shut down parts of its brain, the better to protect it. As a standard action, it can enter a trance which duplicates a *mind blank* spell. While the trance lasts, the harvester cannot vary the type of action that it is involved in from round to round without dropping the *mind blank*. If it is working, it must continue to work; if attacking, it must continue to attack. The harvester is not mindlessly bound to this course of action and can choose to do something else at any time, but if it does so, the *mind blank* drops and the harvester must take another standard action to reactivate it, should it wish to do so.

Rend/Shred Armour (Ex): If a harvester hits with two slam attacks, it pulls apart any armour worn by its foe. This attack deals 2d8+24 points of damage to the opponent's armour. Creatures not wearing armour are dealt 2d8+24 points of damage. Armour reduced to zero hit points is destroyed. Damaged armour may be repaired with a successful Craft (armoursmithing) check.

Shatter Object (Su): Harvesters often break large pieces of trash into bits so they can be swallowed. A harvester's attacks deal double damage to objects and always deal maximised doubled damage to unattended objects (a total of 40 points of damage for a slam hit). Harvesters also deal double damage to construct creatures.

Swallowing Gate (Su): The harvester's mouth is the opening to another dimension. A harvester can attempt to swallow a grabbed foe of Medium size or smaller by making a grapple check. The foe is not harmed; instead it is pitched into an interplanar gateway. A swallowed creature must make a Will save (DC 28) or be transported to the Trashgardens as if by a *plane shift* spell (caster level 20th). A creature who successfully saves is still considered grappled but not swallowed; the harvester can try to swallow it again on its next turn. Creatures unable to shift through the planes, such as creatures that have been subjected to *dimensional anchor*, cannot be swallowed. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Telepathy (Su): A harvester may communicate telepathically with any other sklavadok within one mile.

Sklavadok Tallyman

Medium Outsider (Sklavadok)
Hit Dice: 7d8+21 (52 hp)
Initiative: +5
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)
Armour Class: 15 (+5 Dex), touch 15, flat-footed 10
Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+9

Attack: Masterwork swordstick +13 melee (1d6+2/18–20)
Full Attack: Masterwork swordstick +13/+8 melee (1d6+2/18–20); or masterwork swordstick +11/+6 melee (1d6+2/18–20) and stick scabbard +9 melee (1d4)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Spell-like abilities
Special Qualities: Sklavadok traits
Saves: Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +8
Abilities: Str 15, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 15
Skills: Appraise +12, Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Gather Information +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (local) +10, Listen +10, Profession (rubbish disposal) +10, Search +10, Spot +10
Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (sklavadok swordstick)[B], Persuasive, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse
Environment: Any urban and the Trashgardens
Organisation: Solitary, team (1 tallyman plus 1 harvester) or squad (2 plus 2–4 harvesters)
Challenge Rating: 5
Treasure: Double items
Alignment: Usually lawful neutral
Advancement: By character class
Level Adjustment: +7

The tallymen are the spokespeople, negotiators and organisers among the sklavadok. These are human-like creatures who consider themselves the royalty of their domain. Filthy, scabby dogs often follow at their heels.

The tallymen dress in a 'genteel shabby' style. Men favour hats and waistcoats along with nice stout walking sticks (which usually prove to be swordsticks). Women dress in as many layers as is practical, with young sklavadok maids swaddled in multiple skirts of tattered lace and old women padded out with coats worn on top of one another. The sklavadok tradition is to wear clothes all the time, never removing them for sleep; when the innermost layer finally rots and falls apart in rags, a new layer is added.

Tallymen are bright and jolly to talk to and enjoy jokes, but they do not tolerate disrespect. They are the kings of their own realm. When patronised or insulted, their grins do not budge, but cold glints come into their eyes and their speech becomes subtly menacing.

The tallymen's favoured class is rogue.

Sklavadok Swordstick: Tallymen carry walking sticks whose handles form the pommels of concealed rapier blades. When not in use a swordstick is effectively a concealed weapon, with a +10 equipment bonus on the Hide check to conceal it. The hollow stick can be wielded in the off hand as a club for two-weapon fighting. The swordstick is an exotic weapon and requires a feat to wield proficiently.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will – *mending;* 3/day – *displacement* (DC 15), *minor creation, spider climb, stinking cloud* (DC 14); 1/day – *plane shift* (DC 19). The caster level is 14th; the save DC is Charisma-based.

Temporal Enclosure Cyst

The sklavadok place dangerous creatures or items within their temporal enclosure cysts, situated in the core of the Trashgarden, their labyrinthine home. All cysts look identical. They are stubby stone-like pyramids without any visible entrances, measuring 60 feet across at the base. A cyst's only external feature is an inscription on one face which details the contents in the sklavadok tongue.

A creature enclosed within a cyst is subject to permanent *temporal stasis* and *nondetection*, with an effective caster level of 25th. The anchorite who placed the *temporal encystment* can remove it with a touch; otherwise only a *freedom* spell dissolves it, and even this is dependent upon a caster level check (DC 36). The caster must also know the name and a few details of the creature to be freed.

Appendix 4: The World of Ashfar

The countries of Ashfar range from cosmopolitan democracies where races of all kinds mingle freely to entrenched bastions of tradition where the same race or class has been dominant for centuries. Unlike other worlds, where different cultures slowly reached out to encounter one another, Ashfar has had a central hub for the past fifteen hundred years. The civilisation that rules that hub has had an impact upon virtually all of the humanoid races.

Civilisations from all over the world have been brought into contact with each other via the Xoth Sarandi sea-gates. This has led to a global culture of suavity and acceptance in which one is just as likely to encounter a half-naked barbarian walking down the street as one is to meet a noble in his finery.

Boskenland

The humans who live here have made their homes in about as cold and forbidding a place as can be imagined, yet they seem to like it. Boskenland is all birch woods, bleak hills and blue rocky outcrops. The original human settlers were from Jehannum, and they have retained their burly, robust approach to life.

Brith's Folly

This craggy, featureless stretch of land is where the god Brith is said to have severed his malformed left hand, which then grew into the spider-goddess She that the drow worship. A crack in the ground supposedly leads to the kingdom of the drow.

Caldraza

A long-established monarchy, Caldraza is one of the wealthier and more refined human nations. The country recently converted officially to the Marianist religion, sweeping away the old pagan pantheon still worshipped in Chillhame, Ghael and Jehannum. King Titus lost his son and heir a year ago in a murderous attack by a clan of Ghael, leading him to declare war on that entire nation. Troops are gathering on the river border, but hostilities have not yet fully broken out.

Caldraza supplies most of the world with fine glass products; it has plentiful supplies of the necessary raw materials, and has had generations of experts to work with them. The royal palace at Beacon City is walled on the outside with black glass panels.

Cendra

The land bridge between the northern and southern continents is a sprawling rainforest many hundreds of miles from end to end. While the colonists to the north have been able to cope with the more temperate climes there, even if they have had to wrest the land from monsters, the humidity and sheer danger of Cendra's jungles remain too much for them. The rainforest is thickly infested with kobolds on its outer edges and reptilian life forms in its unexplored heart.

There are travellers' tales of human tribes living in the jungle who speak no known language, though these have never been verified. Expeditions have, however, brought golden ornaments and utensils out of deepest Cendra; whether these are the work of humanoids or some skilled non-humanoid race remains a mystery.

Chillhame

This small island is notable only for being the place where a massive drow army was defeated a thousand years ago, at the end of the last Equinox of the Heroes. It is independent, though the kingdom of Caldraza has long considered it a part of itself and is keen to recover it. The capital of Chillhame is Saragost, a walled city that boasts a fortified harbour.

Corona

Corona, also called the 'Crown of the World', is a series of gigantic ice peaks that rise out of the sea, strangely regular and artificial-looking. The peaks form an insurmountable barrier concealing whatever lies beyond them from the eyes of the world. Although creatures with the power of flight could theoretically fly over the mountains to see what secrets Corona hides, none is known to have successfully done so. Wild theories nonetheless abound, with some tale-tellers insisting that beyond the peaks there is a titanic hole leading to the interior of the world, and others describing a bizarre city built by a race older even than the elves.

Whatever is beyond the peaks of Corona, one thing is known: it occasionally sets the northern sky on fire with rainbows of light that chase each other in arcs and ripples. These lights can be seen from the Waste and from the northern mountains of Caldraza.

The Eagle Nations

Originally this huge country was entirely wild and was referred to as the Scarred Land. Monstrous humanoids, giants and dire animals made up its population; the only humanoids to live here were small bands of wood elves who were tough and resilient enough to cope. Some six hundred years ago a group of decommissioned Caldrazan warriors decided that it was better to live as rulers in a new land than as servants in an old one. They set off for the Scarred Land, determined to carve themselves out a place in the world.

The fighting was hard, but they cleared out an area large enough to support a village and kept it fortified. This village grew into a town and eventually a small city. The elves of Xoth Sarandi, impressed by the humans' bravery and tenacity, constructed a sea-portal to help them bring in supplies and colonists.

For the last five centuries, colonists have been shipping out to the Scarred Land with the same dream as the original warriors. Every country in the world, with the exceptions of the elven nations, has had people leave for better lives in the colonies. The elves retain their attitude of quiet observation, though they continue to give assistance; a second sea-portal was constructed on the western coast a hundred years after the first. The frontier has been steadily pushed back from both sides, so that all that remains of the original wilderness is a broad patch in the centre, which is crammed full of monsters forced out of their original habitats. This patch is still called the Scarred Land.

The settlers organised themselves into regional states, feudal or democratic according to the citizens' preference. This collection of sub-kingdoms was termed the Eagle Nations, as it represented liberty and freedom from the chains of the past. For a brief period the Eagle Nations were united by common treaty and were, collectively, the most powerful country on the planet. Unfortunately, strife between the different kingdoms has caused the Eagle Nations to collapse in on itself, turning a league of allied powers into a country of feuding principalities.

Ghael

Tribal humans organised into clans populate this wild hilly country. Their culture is similar to that of historical Scotland. The clans are constantly feuding with one another, with no one clan holding dominance for long. Caldraza recently declared war on Ghael, prompting the clans to set aside their differences and unite against a common enemy.

The border between Ghael and Caldraza is the River Schlass, which is too broad to be fordable in its lower reaches and runs through the monster-infested Forest of Meere in its upper portion. The Caldrazans have built a chain of forts along their side of the Schlass to watch for hostile forces. The Ghaels in turn have established camps along their side, but lack the organisation to build permanent defences.

The Horned Reaches

This vast area of desolate prairie is named for the herds of horned animals (buffalo, ibex, antelope, feral cattle and the like) that roam across it, migrating from one feeding ground to the next. It has never been settled, as there is no easy way to transport materials and supplies out into the deep wilderness. Besides, the land is more suited to wild herds than to people. Some wild tribes of elves live here, the descendants of exiles who were driven from Shallenoi centuries ago and who have adapted to living in the inhospitable wild land.

The Horned Reaches form a natural barrier around Shallenoi. Few people bother crossing the seemingly endless prairie to reach the elven lands, which is one reason they have lain undisturbed for so long. The sea-gate between Xoth Sarandi and Shallenoi is open only to the elves and to those whom they invite. It is not open to tourists or casual visitors.

Jehannum

This militaristic human country is home to a proud breed of humans who are convinced of their own superiority and invulnerability. The dwarves of Svarth have traded with the humans of Jehannum for centuries, exchanging dwarven metalwork for human meat, beer and cereals, with the result that Jehannum is now the most strongly armed and armoured country in the world. The Iron Dukes rule the country from Burgenstoch Castle, a steel-plated fortress in the capital, Crom Calamar.

The drow were once tolerated and sheltered in Jehannum. Following the defeat of their armies in Chillhame, the humans showed compassion for the survivors (mostly females and children) and assigned them land that they could cultivate, on the understanding that they would cause no trouble. Much to the surprise of all concerned, the drow proved able to cohabit peacefully, establishing settlements and even trading their knowledge of magic and alchemy with their human protectors.

This arrangement came to a bitter, bloody end when the elves of Xoth Sarandi offered Jehannum a massive sum in tribute to cancel the protection, quietly promising a bounty for the head of any drow collected in addition to this. The humans gave vent to their hatred and forced the drow out of the region, an act which the drow have never forgotten, much less forgiven.

Kahoor

This hot country, blessed with mineral wealth and huge tracts of fertile land, has a rigid caste system, developed when the elves first made contact and entrenched by them over the years. The nobility are so far removed from the peasantry that they are virtually a different species.

The King of Kahoor, Parhav the Thirty-First, is a boy of fourteen. Despite his age, he is not sentimental and has overseen quite draconian punishments for his subjects. The law in Kahoor is rigid and ignorance of it is not an excuse. Furthermore, the upper classes can commit certain offences with impunity, while a serf will be stoned to death for the same thing. There literally is one law for the rich and another for the poor.

Kahoor's principal dependency, Shumil, is much more relaxed. Many of Kahoor's people migrate to Shumil in hopes of finding a more tolerant society, though the work there is no less hard.

On the border of Kahoor and Urmish lies the Wall of Grand Iora, a spectacular structure of white stone, consisting of a single unbroken wall with guard towers at half-mile intervals. The Wall has defended Kahoor against the monstrous humanoids of Urmish for generations.

Kandang

Lower Kandang, on the southern tip of the continent, is a marshy place of river deltas and rice fields, where the houses of common folk are built on stilts. This part of Kandang has whole families of boat people who live their lives migrating from island to island. Further north one finds ancient cities and lonely towers on hillsides, along with curious ruins from an age where dragons walked among men in human form.

A hereditary line of sorcerers forms the monarchy of Kandang. The usual claims of dragon blood apply. Specifically, the ruling king claims descent from the golden dragons who lived in the area when humans were still living in caves. These legends are well documented and are in fact true.

To be a sorcerer in Kandang is a great honour, as it proves that one is related (however distantly) to the royal ones of old, the Dragon-Kings of Kandang. However, it does make for some strange customs that are repellent to foreigners.

The best-known custom is that of blood preservation. In order to preserve the royal blood in its full strength, interbreeding among the royal family is not only common but required by law. Brothers are married to sisters and parents to children. The result of this is that several members of the dynasty are both physically and mentally unusual. Those with the strongest concentrations of dragon blood sometimes have draconian characteristics such as hourglass-shaped pupils, forked tongues or scaly-looking skin.

Lost Athul

This island was once home to the Myrrik, a species of sentient tentacled bipeds that has now died out, who worshipped a vast sea-beast as an incarnate deity. Although the Myrrik never allowed visitors further inland than their ports, leading to speculation that they were carrying out horrible rites in their lopsided temples, they were still willing to trade. They supplied Xoth Sarandi with pearls, whale oil and fish in such quantities that a sea-portal was built by the harbour in order to deal with the volume of shipping.

Athul was lost in a titanic cataclysm that submerged the island completely. The Myrrik appeared to have been wiped out entirely; the trading ships that came found thousands of floating bodies. The sea-portal is still standing.

Murduk Râm

This country of high mountains and eternal snow is under the control of a wise, benign monarch, King Kallimon, who remains neutral regarding the conflicts of his neighbours and has occasionally been able to broker diplomatic solutions to their differences. Nobody has ever been able to invade this country, as even the peasants seem to be schooled in martial arts.

There is an abundance of monasteries in Murduk Râm which draw seekers from all the nations of the world. Those who would learn the fighting arts of the monk are well advised to pack lightly and travel to the mountains.

Qual

This region is thickly forested, with great rolling swathes of green land between the wooded regions. It is widely believed to be the most beautiful country on Ashfar; of all the settled lands, it is certainly the least built upon. Qual is home to several thousand families of wood elves who came here via the sea-portals from Xoth Sarandi and preferred life in the wild to the unending dream of Shallenoi.

There is also a huge half-elf population in Qual. This goes back to the time when Scallandriax and the armies that were allied with him laid waste to the kingdom of Kandang, sending the populations of entire towns fleeing into the forests of Qual for shelter. They had previously had a superstitious fear of the forests and the elves who dwelt there, but the horror that was tearing their land apart

was worse. The elves realised that the humans were unfit for life in the deep forest and would die without their help. They chose to shelter them, even going so far as to adopt some of them into their own families.

One thousand years after these events, there are very few pureblooded humans left in the forests of Qual. Almost the entire population is elven or half-elven.

Shallenoi

This was the original elven homeland before Xoth Sarandi was discovered and colonised. It is the oldest continuous civilisation in the world. Only that of the now-destroyed Myrrik was older. Many of the glorious temples, palaces and towers of Shallenoi have stood for three thousand years and are expected to stand for three thousand more. Nothing important has changed in all that time; the inhabitants seem almost as if they are living in a perfect dream. Shallenoi is a flawed paradise, a place simultaneously beautiful and stagnant, stifled under the weight of its own history.

There is more magic worked in Shallenoi than anywhere else on Ashfar. The country seems to run on it. At times it is as if the occupants would rather cast a spell than exert themselves in any other way, even for something so simple as opening or closing a door or lifting a book from a shelf. The place is, as human wizards have been known to say, 'drunk on magic.'

The Shard

This island, once a small human prison colony, has been completely taken over by pirates. They prey on ships whose owners are too poor (or too mean) to pay to use the sea-portals and take the long overseas route to the Eagle Nations. The pirates of the Shard are not the only group of freebooters in the Incarnadine Ocean; there is at least one other major group, the Sea Harriers, whose home is as yet undiscovered.

The Shard was unintentionally created by Jehannum, Caldraza and Kahoor. When the Eagle Nations were still in their infancy, these countries used the Shard as a dumping ground for their undesirables, sending them to live there in exile as a fate preferable to execution. The criminals of the Shard soon organised themselves into an efficient force, making weapons from wood and using what limited magic they had to help shape metal. They were able to overpower a ship that came to deliver the next load of convicts, setting the prisoners free and using the ship to harass colonists who were coming to the Eagle Nations to start new lives.

Reports tell of a Pirate Queen who rules the Shard, supposedly a former noble of Kahoor. The Shard has not been a prison colony for many years; new arrivals are born rather than brought in on ships. A child born in the Shard is raised to be one thing only: a rogue. Rogues trained in the Shard sometimes make their way to other lands, where they put their skills to good use.

The Desert of Sharn

This bleak, sandy zone of dead land effectively seals off Jehannum and the north-western countries from the remainder of the eastern continent. It is all but uninhabitable; only monsters, madmen and hard-bitten desert nomads live here.

As if the heat and lack of landmarks were not enough, large lodestone deposits cause magnetic compasses to behave erratically, making magic the only means of navigating the desert. There are legends of demon-haunted rock plateaus in the desert's centre, though these have never been confirmed.

Shumil

Whereas the colonisation of the Eagle Nations was an every-man-for-himself affair, with warriors claiming whatever regions of the Scarred Land they could take, the colonisation of Shumil was far more orderly.

Shumil was originally almost as inhospitable as the rest of the Horned Reaches. However, when colonists from Kahoor first arrived, they brought their distinctive irrigation and plateau cultivation methods with them, which quickly brought flourishing crops to the region.

Shumil remains a satellite of the kingdom of Kahoor, supplying that country with exotic spices and silks. Its culture is much like that of Kahoor, but without so much of its old-world hierarchy. Shumil is a land of merchants, labourers and tradesmen, not of lords and serfs. Natives of Shumil are usually humorous, sarcastic and enterprising, quick to see the potential profit in any undertaking.

The Spine

Jagged mountains, known collectively as the Spine, encircle the southernmost landmass of Ashfar. These are not the immense ice peaks of Corona, but a series of broken, crooked masses inhabited by frost giants and other monstrous creatures. The land around the South Pole is taboo; none of the residents of the outer mountains will go there. This is because it is a frozen battlefield. It preserves the frost-stiffened bodies of hundreds of dead ice giants and their warriors, a grim memorial of a time when the various giant clans waged war upon each other.

Svarth

This mountainous region is home to more dwarves than any other part of Ashfar. The rock is rich with precious mineral deposits and good iron ore, and the dwarves have tunnelled deep to extract it. The dwarves of Svarth are on good terms with the humans of Jehannum, whose gritty, unsentimental, militaristic ways appeal to them. They have fought alongside them more than once, most notably in the Battle of the Azoic Sea.

The mountains to the northeast of Svarth are not populated by humanoids at all. They are among the last places on Ashfar to be haunted by dragons. So long as the dragons are left alone, they are willing to leave the dwarves and humans in peace; instead they pursue their own long-smouldering feuds and bitter territorial disputes.

The Topaz Dominions

This mighty kingdom of pyramids and sand dunes is ruled by a Sun King whom his people believe to be the earthly incarnation of a god. Its people are sun-browned and brawny, raised with a respect for wizardly magic, since human wizards are often in charge of the cities here. The Sun King's special infantry forces, the Phoenix Legions, are also priests of his faith, giving them the power to wield divine magic while in the fray.

The lands of the Topaz Dominions are strikingly different from the northern countries in that buildings are made from clay and stone rather than bricks and mortar, and some of the finer items that one would expect to find (such as sophisticated locks, full plate armour and rapiers) are rare or missing altogether. The people are content to live in a more technologically backward land, as the prevalence of magic makes many devices redundant.

Urmish

To the northeast of Visk are the hills, woods and low mountains of Urmish, which is the closest thing to a goblinoid nation anywhere on Ashfar. As with so many countries, the border with Visk is a river, in this case the River Blute.

Urmish contains massed tribes of orcs, goblins, hobgoblins, ogres and bugbears, without any humanoid settlements at all. Only the jungles of Cendra are less civilised. The Wall of Grand Iora prevents the creatures of Urmish from moving south, while the River Blute and the tough natives of Visk keep them from moving further westwards. It is worth noting that 'Urmish' is the human name for this region; the population themselves do not have a name for it, nor do they even recognise it as a country. It is simply the place where they live.

Valjinn

The predominantly human Republic of Valjinn is a prosperous and stable country. With murky, damp Kandang to the south and the cryptic, bleak mountains of Murduk Râm to the north, Valjinn is a realm of stability between two extremes. The rulers, a council of elected representatives headed by a president referred to as the Falcon Elect, are based in the city of Sephardia.

There is considerable hostility between Kandang and Valjinn. Kandang once occupied the entire region south of Murduk Râm, including the forests of Qual and most of the southern portion of Kahoor. Under the benign (if autocratic) rule of the Dragon-Kings, the entire region was renowned for its wealth, its magical prowess and the wisdom of its rulers.

Approximately one thousand years ago, at the last Equinox of the Heroes, many of the family of the Dragon-Kings were destroyed, along with their patron golden dragons. At the head of this massacre was the black dragon Scallandriax, who had recently fought and overcome the silver dragon Aristeele above the mountains of Svarth and was now convinced of his own invulnerability. The rule of the golden ones in Kandang had been an annoyance to Scallandriax for many years, and he tore into their civilisation without mercy. Many of the humans fled into the eastern forests (the land that is now Qual) for refuge, where groups of elves took pity on them and helped to shelter them.

In the chaos that followed, the remnants of the Dragon-Kings attempted to re-establish their rule over southern Kandang, while a group of ordinary humans simultaneously rallied the survivors in the north. Without their dragon patrons to guide them, the Dragon-Kings rapidly became mere tyrants demanding subjection and obeisance. This only hardened the resolve of the rebels, who declared that Valjinn was to be an independent republic.

Vella

The hills of Vella are where the gnomes live. They have kept goodwill with their halfling neighbours in Verd for many years, though they are far more curious and eager to explore the world. The academies of Vella are acknowledged to be the best in the world where mechanical sciences and handcrafting are concerned, and as a result gnome artisans are in high demand. Trainee artisans spend a 'journeyman year' travelling the world and working wherever they are required, usually as jewellers, stonemasons or metalsmiths.

The capital city of Vella is Quinazzi, the 'pale snow jewel', a city of canals, walkways and intricate stone fascias.

Verd

This green and peaceful country is the home of Ashfar's halflings. They live here as they have always lived, content and isolated from the world. The dangers here are very few; there are no monsters anymore and even strangers from other races are uncommon. The elves of Xoth Sarandi intended to build a sea-portal by Verd but the halflings petitioned them not to, as they did not want their home opened up to the world. Their request was honoured and Verd was left in peace.

Occasionally a halfling born in Verd finds the peace and quiet unbearable and goes adventuring, taking a ship to Jehannum, Caldraza or the Eagle Nations. Many halfling adventurers hail from Verd and have a strange mixture of homesickness for the place and resentment of it.

Visk

The Empire of Visk covers more ground than any other single dominion of Ashfar, ranging from the temperate eastern zones to the flat northern tundra where only nomads and shamans go. The people of Visk were nomadic for many generations before they settled down, and they are still most comfortable in the saddle, ranging from town to town. The horsemen of Visk are the finest in the world, whether they be cavalry of the royal guard or raiders who prey on the border towns.

The Emperor of Visk is Caranacus, who is sixty years old and looks forty, and rules his empire with the confidence of an unconquerable tyrant. He is known to have escaped death countless times, walking away from assassination attempts that left those around him torn to shreds.

Some say that Caranacus is no longer human, that he is some sort of vampire or incarnate ghost. Others claim that he is one and the same person as the historical conqueror Uzbal Jin, who subjugated the lands of western Visk eight hundred years ago and set an entire city to the torch when they did not capitulate quickly enough. Whatever he may truly be, his people all fear him, even those who adore him and would gladly die in his name.

There is an uneasy peace between Visk and Jehannum, though the two nations have been at war more than once in the past. The Desert of Sharn forms a natural buffer between them, though its northern coast is less harsh than its central region and invading armies can be (and have been) sent through it. The most celebrated failed invasion of Jehannum came three hundred years ago during the Battle of the Azoic Sea, when a massive force of troop ships from Visk attempted to land on the eastern coast of Jehannum and were repelled by the dwarves and humans of that land. Jehannum's superior siege weaponry smashed dozens of the ships of Visk to splinters before they could make landfall.

The Waste

Beyond the limits of Boskenland and the Eagle Nations lies a zone of barren tundra that ultimately becomes an arctic wasteland. No humanoids have ever settled here, for though there is enough hunting to support life, the area is home to dreadful monsters that shun the warmer climes of the south. There are various local tales of a snow warlock or ice queen who has a frosty citadel in the depths of the Waste, but this citadel has never been seen by human eyes.

The nearest settlement to the Waste is Ommersdale, a thriving town built upon the fur trade.

Xoth Sarandi

The island of Xoth Sarandi, home of the elven archmages, is the undisputed centre of the world. Around the island are titanic stone archways, the sea-portals, which connect to similar archways in far-off parts of the globe. This feat of magic enabled the elves to colonise the various continents and keep their colonies supplied and defended without having to risk the hazards of the open sea. Later, when the portals were made available to other races, the elves grew wealthy beyond measure from the fees they were able to charge for the use of their transport system.

Xoth Sarandi is the crossroads of the world. Almost all ocean-going traffic travels to its destination via this magical island. It is almost entirely urbanised, with two tiers to the city. The outer districts are those in which the other races live, along with those elves who are involved with shipping or trade. These districts are essentially a huge mass of dockland, with buildings ranging from salubrious structures of marble where ships with peacock sails lie in harbour all the way down to filthy warehouses and wharves where the worst excesses of the decadent can be indulged.

The inner districts are restricted to the elves and their few honoured guests. They are, politically and magically, the most important regions in all of Ashfar, as they are the points from which the portal network is controlled. This system is the source of the ruling houses' immense wealth and the enduring dominance of the elves, even though they no longer have colonies across the world and the sun has finally set on their empire.

Timeline

Date	Event
-3000	According to legend, the god Brith causes the creation of She.
-2700	The first dynasty of Dragon-Kings establishes its rule in Kandang.
-2650	Lost Athul is founded by the Myrrik.
-2000	The cathedral of Brith is built in Shallenoi.
-1010	Shallenoi receives word that the drow are massing. Divinations reveal that the Dark is manifesting itself on Ashfar.
-1000	Elves create the first Starborn to fight against the Dark. The first Equinox of the Heroes occurs. Drow forces led by the Black Titan, an avatar of the Dark, clash with the Starborn in the Horned Reaches. The war ends in a stalemate, with the drow withdrawing.
-30	The founding of Xoth Sarandi. Elves settle Chillhame and found Saragost.
1	The second Equinox of the Heroes occurs. The Black Titan is defeated, and his stone heart is taken back underground to form the Abyssal Altar.
110-150	Sea-portals are built across the world, and elven hegemony begins.
333	The destruction of Lost Athul.
381	Saragost is destroyed in the Great Conflagration.
860	The Temple of Kharad is built in marshes east of Crescent City.
890	An elven governor is installed in Kahoor. The elves now control most of the world, with only the human empire of Kandang remaining independent.
891	The elves abandon their attempt to govern Svarth.
994	The human slave Marius has his 'Vision of the Wheel' and begins to preach in Crescent City.
996	Faith in Marius prompts an insurrection against elven rule. Marius travels across the western continents spreading his message.
997	Marius is executed in Crescent City by being lashed to the hands of the great clock and torn asunder; he prophesies the fall of the elven hegemony before he dies.
999	The elves abandon Caldraza to human rule; their withdrawal back to Xoth Sarandi and Shallenoi begins.
1000	The third Equinox of the Heroesoccurs. Finding the elves largely gone from the eastern continent, the drow destroy the Forest of Sharn utterly, leaving only desert behind.
1002	The Dragon-Kings of Kandang take the lead in the war against the drow and are destroyed. Scallandriax defeats Aristeele above Svarth, bringing an end to the influence of the metallic dragons. Many of Kandang's citizens flee into the forest of Qual for protection.

1004	The conclusion of the last Drow War, as the drow are defeated at Chillhame by elves and freed human slaves fighting together. The death of Starkweather John. The exile of House Arakh.
1005	Drow families are allowed to settle in Jehannum.
1006	The Ragged Man withdraws to the Temple of Kharad.
1007-1018	Ongoing civil war between remnants of the Dragon-King dynasty and their former subjects.
1020	The Republic of Valjinn is formed in the northern part of what used to be Kandang.
1178	The tyrant Uzbal Jin devastates Visk and attempts to undermine Jehannum by bribing drow agents to sabotage key targets. Many drow are lynched on suspicion of collaboration (in numbers which remain unrecorded).
1190	Uzbal Jin vanishes in the mountains north of Visk; no body ever found.
1312	The elves of Xoth Sarandi bribe the humans to break their treaty with the drow; the drow are massacred in Jehannum and driven back underground.
1422	The first Caldrazan colonists land on the shores of what will become the Eagle Nations.
1490	The dwarves of Svarth make an alliance with the human rulers of Jehannum. Burgenstoch Castle is built.
1500	Revolt in the Shard prison colony; Shard becomes a pirate haven.
1507	Civil war in the Topaz Dominions; the ruling dynasty is wiped out, and the first Sun King of the Topaz Dominions is crowned.
1539	Shumil is founded.
1649	The Halls of Concord are founded in Xoth Sarandi.
1701	Visk attempts to invade Jehannum, and is repelled at the Battle of the Azoic Sea.
1842	The Eagle Nations unite under a common treaty.
1850	Caldraza invades Chillhame; the invaders are driven off with help from the Eagle Nations and mercenaries from Ghael.
1867	Civil unrest rocks the Eagle Nations; the principality of Oshyo declares independence.
1880	The principality of Oshyo agrees to rejoin the Eagle Nations, restoring unity.
1971	After many years of dispute, the Eagle Nations collapse back into isolated principalities.
1990	Thom and Lolly Lankin, the King and Queen of Thieves, are executed in Crescent City.
1999	Prince Rufus and Princess Anastasia of Caldraza are slaughtered in Ghael. War is declared. King Titus announces that Caldraza is converting to the Marian religion.
2000	The events of *The Drow War, Book One* begin.

Pantheons of Ashfar

If the Ashfar campaign background is used, religious characters may choose from the following deities.

Avillon

The Avillon pantheon is worshipped in Chillhame. It was also worshipped in Caldraza before that kingdom officially adopted the church of Marius as its state religion. Humans, halflings and dwarves are most likely to be followers of these deities.

Aranu

Aranu is the high god of the pantheon, a personification of the Sun who bears a spear of golden fire. He is the Lawmaker of the Gods, setting limits on what even the divine beings may do. Aranu is the special patron deity of kings and tribal chiefs.

Domains: Law, Protection, Sun, War
Alignment: Lawful neutral
Weapon: Spear

Blediwesse

Blediwesse is the Flower-Maiden of Spring Rain. She is the special patron goddess of unmarried maidens. She brings life to the earth after the ravages of winter, blessing the earth with the waters that cause plants to ripen. She is also a goddess of wells and rivers who sends the waters of the natural springs for the good of men. Priestesses of Blediwesse must be virginal and often go crowned with flowers as part of their regalia.

Domains: Earth, Good, Healing, Water
Alignment: Neutral good
Weapon: Sickle

Firinna

Scarlet-haired Firinna is the quick-tempered goddess of the hearth and of battle. She is compared to the sudden spark that shoots from the fire and burns down one's house when one is not looking. She represents the stubborn, selfish side of humanity and is a goddess of envy, resentment and grudges, though she is also the fiery spirit that inspires one to fight to one's last breath.

Domains: Chaos, Fire, Trickery, War
Alignment: Chaotic neutral
Weapon: Longsword

Gahaira

Gahaira is the goddess of the north wind, the goddess of hunger, leanness, want and desolation. She is portrayed as an old woman with a lean face and straggly hair. She is mostly propitiated rather than worshipped, with offerings left for her as the evenings begin to grow dark so that she will not blow too fiercely in the winter months. Men do not like to speak of her by name and refer to her instead by her title, 'the Witch of November'.

Domains: Air, Death, Destruction, Evil
Alignment: Neutral evil
Weapon: Flail

Hernun

Hernun is the god of the hunt, eternally locked in chase to bring down his brother Wohoon. Sometimes one brother wins, sometimes the other, but the hunt always begins afresh. Hernun represents man at his most basic, contending with the wild. Druids often revere him, though the more chaotic ones favour Wohoon. He is represented as a powerfully-built man with antlers tied to his head in honour of the beasts he hunts.

Domains: Animal, Protection, Strength, Travel
Alignment: Neutral
Weapon: Bow

Hombel

Hombel is the Innkeeper, the Storesman, the god of preserving things. He is the one who gives one one's due; as such, he is a god of justice, especially of the kind that is often called '*karma*', in which one gets what one gives out. He is represented as a fat, jolly man with a sack over his shoulder. In the abstract he is symbolised by a set of scales.

Domains: Good, Law, Protection, Strength
Alignment: Lawful good
Weapon: Mace

Merrithrawn

The bearded Merrithrawn is the god of bards, sometimes called the Charm-Singer. In legends he is so persuasive that he can change the very machinery of the universe to suit himself simply by talking it around. Rogues often favour Merrithrawn, as he embodies the charm and panache that lets one talk one's way out of a sticky situation.

Domains: Knowledge, Luck, Magic, Trickery
Alignment: Neutral good
Weapon: Short sword

Old Heakun

This god is also called 'the Walker of the Plains'. He is muddy brown in colour and is the grandfather of the gods. Unlike them, he did not stay in the heavens and instead chose to wander the earth continually, examining this strange creation that he had made. It is said that Heakun placed megaliths along his path to mark where he had been, giving rise to the legend of invisible lines of force that crisscross the countryside.

Domains: Earth, Magic, Protection, Travel
Alignment: Neutral
Weapon: Club

Wandul

Wandul is the holly-crowned god of the winter months, the god of the cold and the dark. He comes when the darkness begins to grow greater than the light. As with many of the darker gods of the pantheon, the only time he is worshipped is when people want him to stay away. Worshippers of Wandul are few and are usually fighters or barbarians who revere him as a grim, challenging deity of Strength. Some humans believe that Wandul was originally a god of the giants, left behind from an earlier time.

Domains: Death, Destruction, Plant, Strength
Alignment: Lawful evil
Weapon: Heavy Mace

Wohoon

Wohoon is the god of the wild things, brother to Hernun. He is not fully human and has the ears and teeth of a wolf. There is nothing of civilisation about him at all. The only worshippers of Wohoon are druids and those who live their lives in the outdoors. Everyone else is content to honour him for what he is – the wild animal nature that they have left behind.

Domains: Animal, Chaos, Strength, Trickery
Alignment: Chaotic neutral
Weapon: Greatclub

Yosa

Yosa Charm-Weaver is the goddess of all crafters and makers, from the blacksmith and the woodcarver to the seamstress and even the stonemason. She is depicted as a statuesque woman with long scarlet hair, bearing the Wheel that is her sacred symbol. The Wheel represents all crafts, being simultaneously the potter's wheel, the spinner's treadle and the waggoner's cartwheel. Hers is the knowledge that is passed down within the home; not just the simple business of managing a house, but the crafter's art, vitally important in a cottage industry in which each home is also a place of business. As the goddess who manipulates matter into new patterns, she is also a goddess of magic and of weaving the threads of invisible force. Clerics of Yosa favour the magic of the hearth and home above the more convoluted rituals of high magic. Clay images of Yosa are often kept above the hearth beside those of Hombul to protect the house.

Domains: Knowledge, Law, Magic, Protection
Alignment: Neutral good
Weapon: Sling

Callistan

The Callistan pantheon, named after the now-destroyed holy elven city of Callista where all of the gods of elvenkind were worshipped together, includes all of the deities described below. However, many of them are revered only by the elves or by the drow, not by both. Only two deities, Arosi and Jubb, have followers on both sides of the divide.

Arkady

When She began to bring forth children, she produced a litter of six strange beings resembling Brith in body (for She still bore his elven flesh, having been cut from it) but rich with the darkness that She had absorbed. They were so steeped in darkness that they were more shadow than flesh. Only their bones were wholly solid.

One child, wilier than the rest, crept away unseen. The rest began to tear and devour each other. When the victor finally killed the last of his siblings, it fell asleep in the pile of picked bones – and then the lurking one killed and ate it. This child, the last born and the only survivor, was Arkady.

Arkady is the grand vizier of the drow deities, second only to She in rank. She stands for Intelligence, without which power is only unenlightened force. As such, she is the goddess of all drow archivists, scholars, researchers, alchemists and wizards. Arkady acts as an adviser to She, whispering counsels in her ear, telling her the secrets that others believe are safely concealed.

The drow, a people who cherish their own secrets, do not like other people to keep secrets from them. The Arkady thus presides over spies, interrogators and torturers, as she also has dominion over darkness and the fear of darkness. In truth, Arkady is *more* feared than the primary goddess

of the drow. The head of the secret police is always more terrifying than the monarch.

Arkady's form is that of a drow woman whose dark flesh is as translucent as thin smoke. Her pale skeleton can be seen clearly beneath. Her teeth are filed to sharp points. Her symbolic weapon is the scythe and her symbol is a mirror of obsidian glass.

The drow create statues of Arkady by encasing sculpted silver bones in molten dark glass, which creates an effect as macabre as it is beautiful. Violet flames burn continually before these statues in shrines.

Domains: Death, Evil, Knowledge, Magic
Alignment: Lawful evil
Weapon: Dagger

Arosi

Arosi is the pale goddess of intoxication. As such, she is both honoured and feared by elven society; honoured for the rapture her gifts bring, and feared for the dangerous rage that can result. Her image is placed upon chalices and drinking vessels in order to secure her blessing and remind her that she is not forgotten. Among the elves it is customary, when drinking at a formal occasion, to pour at least one bottle of wine on the ground in honour of fair Arosi as a libation.

Arosi's patronage extends to all things that appear enticing and yet conceal peril for the unwise, such as flowers that are beautiful but secrete poisons. She is not evil, but she is dangerous. She takes the form of a beautiful, slender elven woman with ice-blonde hair and a deceptively innocent smile.

The drow honour Arosi as the goddess of drug-induced debauchery and of the poisons they rely upon so much. Like alcohol itself, Arosi is not a force for evil, though evil beings are among her most fervent worshippers. However, only vegetable poisons are under the dominion of Arosi. Poisons of animal origin, especially those of spiders, are under the direct dominion of She.

Domains: Chaos, Luck, Plant, Trickery
Alignment: Chaotic neutral
Weapon: Dagger

Brith

When the star goddess Nuith first attempted to create a light for her children on earth to see by, she gave birth to the goddess Lumiya, the moon. Although her children saw well enough by the silver light of Lumiya, it was too changeable and faint for the other creatures, and so Nuith focused her will and created the brilliant light of Brith, the sun.

Brith is the sun god of the Callistan pantheon and the chief deity of all. With the exceptions of the insane god Jubb and the two principal drow deities, Arkady and She, the other gods acknowledge his authority and obey his commands. He appears as a powerfully-built male elf armoured with golden chainmail and bearing a double-handed sword that shines like the sun. In the place of his original left hand is a mechanical one made from mithral. The reason for this is given below in the description of 'She'.

Brith is worshipped by all, but especially by warriors and nobles.

Domains: Fire, Good, Law, Sun
Alignment: Lawful neutral
Weapon: Greatsword

Jubb

The fearsome Jubb is pale as a corpse and has eyes of dull red. He is utterly insane. To the elves he symbolises the battle-madness that can take over a warrior's mind. He was the first male child of Nuith but was found unfit to rule because of his madness. He represents the wildness that the civilised elves are proud to have outgrown. Wild elves often revere Jubb, seeing in his madness a spontaneity and joy in life that is to be emulated.

Jubb dresses in spiked armour whose pieces seem to have come from several different sources. It is chaotic and ill-matched, covered with chains and hooks and decorated with checkerboard patterns in some places and grinning demon faces in others.

Domains: Animal, Chaos, Destruction, War
Alignment: Chaotic evil
Weapon: Dire flail

Kyros Threadcutter

Kyros is the elven god of law, reason and exactitude. He clears away illusion and reveals truth. Those who ensure that the law is kept, such as city officials, lawyers and guardsmen, worship him. Despite his intellectual prowess, he is a very popular god among warriors, as he also stands for honesty and plain speaking.

His title of 'Threadcutter' refers to a legend in which he severed the tangled nets of spider-thread spun by She that were holding his fellow deities immobile. Priests of Kyros, who pride themselves on their ability to come straight to the point and not waste time blowing hot air, often recall this legend. In a party of adventurers, a priest of Kyros insists on action over debate.

Kyros is depicted as a grave young man in dark clothing, wearing ornaments of office and carrying a lamp. His symbolic weapon is the rapier, adopted by the priests because of its piercing directness.

Domains: Law, Knowledge, Strength, Sun
Alignment: Lawful neutral
Weapon: Rapier

Lumiya

Lumiya is the elven goddess of the moon. She rules the night as Brith rules the day. She was the first of the gods to emerge from the starry body of Nuith and carries more of her mother's wisdom than any of Nuith's other children. She is the goddess of those who prophesy the future and has a special dominion over the hours of rest when elves enter trance. This means she is also goddess of dreams, which often bring visions of what is to come, and of healing, which is greatly aided by sleep.

The light of Lumiya is that by which night creatures hunt. She is both the protector of animals and the patroness of hunting. If an animal escapes the chase, it is said that Lumiya has blessed it; if the hunting party brings home meat, then thanks are given to Lumiya. Finally, as the changing moon, Lumiya is patroness of the tides of the sea.

Domains: Animal, Healing, Knowledge, Water
Alignment: Neutral good
Weapon: Sickle

Melmoth

Gaunt, saturnine Melmoth, sometimes called 'the King of Shreds and Patches', takes the form of a male elf with black hair in straggly tangles. His features are hollow, as though he has gone hungry for many days. His clothes are tattered and torn and he wears a long, hooded cloak.

Melmoth never rests, moving on from place to place eternally. As a god who exemplifies both magic and ceaseless wandering, he is thus the god of all elven mages who take their magic from town to town looking for employment. He personifies the need that many elves feel for solitude and distance from the annoyances of cities, as well as the wanderlust that draws so many of them to roam far from their homes. Followers of Melmoth generally enjoy good relations with druids, as they share their respect for wild spaces. Many bards also worship him because of their wandering ways.

Domains: Chaos, Knowledge, Magic, Travel
Alignment: Chaotic good
Weapon: Quarterstaff

Nuith

The goddess Nuith is more of a primal force than a deity. She is the starry heaven itself, from which all else emerged. The elves believe her to be the mother of all earthly life, whether evil or good. That which is 'of Nuith' is necessary to existence. Alien forces such as the drow, magical aberrations or demons from other planes are 'not of Nuith'. They are to be feared and guarded against.

Nuith does not have clerics. She is too distant and universal to be worshipped at all. According to legend, she only intervenes in the lives of mortals through her other children, the Starborn. These are the avatars of individual stars, whose destiny it is to protect the world against the forces from outside that threaten it.

Domains: Nuith does not have domains, as she is not worshipped and has no priesthood.
Alignment: —
Weapon: —

The Creation of She

The creation of She is a central elven legend. Brith the sun god, the second child born of Nuith the Star Goddess, was originally deemed unworthy to hold the throne of the elven gods. He was a proven warrior and his courage was unquestionable, but the seeress Lumiya proclaimed that his nature contained a weakness, an evil. Given time, this evil might grow to consume him. So long as Brith was still impure in body and soul, he would not be worthy of the responsibility that was to be his.

The outward sign of this evil within him was his left hand. The rest of Brith's body was beautiful and well proportioned, but his left hand was dark and hook-nailed, the back of it covered with coarse hairs, as if it belonged to something else.

Thus the sun-lord Brith went into the deserts of sand to search his soul and judge whether he was worthy to be a true king of all elves. After thirty nights of wandering and meditation, he made his decision. If there was evil within him, he would cut it out. This was his warrior's mind speaking. Another might have tried to come to terms with the evil, to overcome it by force of will, but not Brith. In a single moment, he drew his sword and hacked off his left hand at the wrist, then flung it with a curse down a rocky ravine, into the darkness where it belonged.

Brith returned to his fellow gods, who welcomed him. Only Lumiya was silent, knowing that the evil had not been overcome but merely moved to a place where none would see it.

Gods are immortal. Their body parts are no less immortal, whether they are still attached or not.

The left hand of Brith, still living, still evil, crouched in the darkness. It pulsed, slowly, realising that it was free. For the first time, it was *itself*. The fingers elongated; new ones exuded themselves in spindly lengths from the wet stump. Four thin, bony fingers wavered feebly beside a stubby thumb, like some horrible birth deformity. The fingers and thumb thickened, darkening to match the rest of the skin. A single hand had become two hands, fused at the wrists.

The knuckles of the thumbs congealed together, forming a bulbous head. Their curved claws clicked as they met and became inward-pointing jaws. As the body gained mass and the fingers became longer and thinner, the thick black hair that had covered the back of the hand now sprouted over the whole creature. She, the devouring Spider Goddess, was born – the evil that the sun god had cut away from himself and cast into darkness.

In the darkness the spider-creature found comfort and strength. She soothed her burning wounds in the cool lightless air. Life was already beginning to breed in her bulbous belly. Away from the light of Brith, shielded from the influence of the Stars, she absorbed the darkness into herself and fed it into her growing eggs like mother's milk. Her children would shun light even as she did. When the time came for the Stars to send their ambassadors to earth, they would be *opposed*. The darkness too would have a voice. It would speak through Her spawn.

Note for the Games Master: The elves of Ashfar do not believe that the drow are truly of the same species as they. They teach that the drow are an alien contamination, the result of the evil that somehow crept into the body of Brith like a spot upon the sun. They are not true children of Nuith, but a cancer. This reflects the elves' own unease that Brith, their principal god, *created* the mother of the drow by casting his own evil nature into a place where it could grow and flourish.

She

The true name of this goddess is never spoken aloud. Only her priestesses and priests may name her, and then only when worshipping her with secret rites. She is the Queen of Spiders and the ultimate sovereign of the drow.

All drow honour She as their mother and protector. She is their inspiration and the reason that spiders are sacred to them. The legend of her creation is paralleled by the way the drow themselves were cut off from the main body of the elven race and exiled beneath the earth. She has other names that the races of Ashfar use to refer to her, but the drow only ever use the term She. They know well enough whom they are talking about.

Domains: Death, Destruction, Evil, Magic, Protection, War
Alignment: Neutral evil
Weapon: Net

Valkazz

Valkazz the Childfree is the goddess of warrior women. She is called 'the Childfree' not because she is virginal but because she stands for a way of life that does not involve bringing up the young. In the elven religions, women who choose paths other than child-rearing and home-making are respected for it. Although males may enter Valkazz's service, her clerics are always female. Priestesses of Valkazz often worship her with riotous celebration that would put any men's feast to shame.

While a cleric of Valkazz is engaged in active temple service, she may take as many husbands as she wishes, but may not become a mother. Should she become pregnant, she must retire from temple service until the child is born, in which event either it is given over to be adopted or the priestess retires altogether, a much rarer event.

Valkazz is depicted as a female elf dressed in leather armour, with broad shoulders and braided waist-length hair. In addition to being a goddess of war, she is also a bringer of favourable winds, so it is customary for an image of Valkazz to be placed at the prow of a ship.

Domains: Air, Destruction, Strength, War
Alignment: Neutral
Weapon: Battleaxe

Vendyss

The voluptuous Vendyss is the goddess of the volcano's heart. In the Callistan pantheon, she presides over all aspects of fire, metal and searing heat. She is depicted as a woman wreathed in fire, with hair the colour of metals in a forge. Legends relate that when she lay down to rest in the aftermath of Creation, her flaming hair spread through the cooling mantle of the earth in strands of silver and gold and glimmering copper. These became the filigree threads of ore that trail through the rock and can be restored back to metal with the application of her own fire.

Clerics of Vendyss are typically weaponsmiths, armourers and jewellers. Those who make their livings working with metal rely on her blessings to prosper at their trades. As she is the goddess of precious metals and of fortunes found under the earth, she is also considered to be the goddess of wealth itself, bringing good luck at the time when it is most needed. Her weapon is a trident which resembles a flaming torch cast in metal. Clerics of Vendyss have great respect for non-evil dragons; they always assist them if they are in need and never assault one except in self-defence.

Domains: Earth, Fire, Good, Luck
Alignment: Neutral
Weapon: Warhammer

Designer's Notes

Here are some observations from along the way, over the eight months it has taken to write the three volumes of *The Drow War*.

Players love to have choices, because it means that they can make a difference in the game world, bringing life to their characters and forging meaning from their gaming experiences.

Games Masters also love players to have choices, because whenever players are faced with them they bicker amongst themselves for hours on end about what to do next, which saves a Games Master from having to do any work.

If you are going to make a villain, then it really is worth your while to make them interesting, even if it takes twice the work. Even in a system that allows Evil with a capital E to be a person's motivation, people are still more complex than mere black hats with statistics. There is a certain terror that the Non-Player Character that you invested two hours in creating will be slaughtered in two minutes. Do not yield to it. The more you know about the character, the better you can respond.

Lengthy descriptions make players nervous. Exploit this mercilessly.

Playtesters are wonderful, brilliant, dedicated people and they do not get enough appreciation in the gaming world. They hold themselves to standards more draconian than some writers do and have a tiring and often thankless job, and yet they are responsible for critically important quality testing.

They are also some of the best friends you will ever have as a designer, particularly if they can tell you diplomatically and clearly what is lacking in your work as well as what is good. It does not matter how creative you think your work is or how good it looks on paper; the proof of the pudding is in the playtesting. Mongoose is lucky enough to have some of the best playtesters in the business. So cheers to Mark, Sam and their crews. You guys are the unsung heroes of gaming.

Demiliches are cool. I admit, I like Bodiless Ao best of all the characters I've dreamed up. He's a nasty piece of work.

Speaking of likes and dislikes, I ought to say a few words about drow. Yes, I was well aware when I took this project on that *they had been done to death*. How could I *not* be aware of that? I'm a gamer! I go out of my house occasionally! Give me some credit!

There was no way around it. Ever since TSR gave us that first foray into the Vault all those years ago, drow had been served up cold, boiled, reheated, with mustard, with cranberry sauce, in pie crust, with dumplings, on toast for months and years. Furthermore, I had seen the live roleplayers covered in black paint and wearing Tina Turner wigs, with plastic spiders glued to their heads with spirit gum, striding around on sunny days as if they owned the field. Every time I saw a 'meh, drow are teh sux' response to the *Drow War* announcements online, I wanted to answer 'You really have *no idea*.'

And that's a shame, because it means that to some gamers, all the flavour has been chewed out

of the drow. I had to get around that, but I also had to produce a campaign that wouldn't tell the drow lovers (and there are plenty of them!) that what they liked was somehow wrong.

So I went back to basics, and did a little revision into the bargain.

The most important step was to make them predominantly lawful. Rules, hierarchy, order. Recast the drow as a *lawful* evil race, and immediately the decadence becomes more like that of a Berlin cabaret in 1938 than that of a thrash party in 1988. Their arrogance and brutality becomes that of a species fanatical about its own superiority. It becomes *institutional* and not just cultural.

Drow in this series are not misunderstood, angst-laden Goths (apart from the Threnody in Velvet, of course, who constitute a nod to today's more enlightened drow!). They are evil, callous, treacherous, irredeemably vile creatures who have a conviction that they are the master race. This is why it is so satisfying to smash them down. They just cannot understand defeat, much less accept it.

The evil that chaotic creatures perpetrate is at least arbitrary and often incoherent. Lawful evil is, to me, more terrifying because it is systematic. Law encourages you to follow the routine instead of asking the questions that might keep evil from becoming entrenched. The bleat from the lowest ranks of a lawful evil society is 'I was only following orders'.

'Yes,' I thought, 'this has legs. I can play with this'.

Thus the temptation to turn the drow into regimented, fanatical agents of darkness instead of the usual hedonistic dalliers with demons proved irresistible. If nothing else, it is a slightly different spin on an old enemy. It seems to have worked, too: *The Drow War, Book One* has been in the shops for a couple of months now, and I was very happy to see the reaction from one reader online that it had 'made the drow evil again'. Good, that's what I was gunning for.

This has been a long and often challenging project which many people have helped me through in various ways. My heartfelt thanks go to the following: Dave and Carl, who provided some suggestions right at the start that were turned into core ideas for the whole series; Randy Milholland, who knows perfectly well what I am thanking *him* for; John Bragg, for location ideas and various kicks to the grey matter; Mel 'Cyanide Breathmint' Wong, who is one of the cleverest, funniest people I know; Andi, for moral support, encouragement and simply being there; Ian and Bridie as always, and especially for giving me an empty house to write in; James and Mel of *Two Lumps*; Gareth, Patrick, Jonny and other LJ gamers, who have been invaluable for peer advice; the people of Virtue server in City of Heroes; Jon, for the ending; Neil G, who told me there should be *songs* in any trilogy with maps in the front; and Melvyn, for the roof over my head, and for being as sound a mate as anyone could wish.

Most thanks of all to Lucy, who began this series as my girlfriend and ends it as my wife (even if she did demand a bag of shiny gemstone dice as an 'early wedding present').

CHARACTER _____ PLAYER _____
CLASS _____ LEVEL _____
RACE: _____
SUBRACE (IF ANY)_____ALIGNMENT _____
PATRON DEITY / RELIGION _____
APPEARANCE_____

AC WHEN FLAT FOOTED	AC VERSUS TOUCH ATTACKS	MAX DEX BONUS	ARMOUR CHECK PENALTY	ARCANE SPELL FAILURE

ABILITY SCORES

	SCORE	MODIFIER	TEMP SCORE	TEMP MODIFIER
STRENGTH				
DEXTERITY				
CONSTITUTION				
INTELLIGENCE				
WISDOM				
CHARISMA				

HIT POINTS

SUB DMG

HIT DIE

DAMAGE REDUCTION

ARMOUR

ARMOUR ◯ CLASS = 10 +

ARMOUR	SHIELD	DEX	WIS	SIZE	NATURAL	MISC

ARMOUR WORN

SAVING THROWS

	TOTAL	BASE	ABILITY	MAGIC	MISC	TEMP
FORTITUDE (CON)						
REFLEX (DEX)						
WILL (WIS)						

MODIFIERS

COMBAT BONUSES

	TOTAL	BASE	MODIFIERS ABILITY	SIZE	MISC	TEMP
INITIATIVE (DEX)						
MELEE (STR)						
RANGED (DEX)						

WEAPONS

WEAPON	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	TYPE	SIZE	HARD	HPS
NOTES								
WEAPON	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	TYPE	SIZE	HARD	HPS
NOTES								
WEAPON	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	TYPE	SIZE	HARD	HPS
NOTES								

STARBORN ABILITIES

PATRON STAR:

GRANTED ABILITIES:

MAX RANKS = LVL +3 (/2)	CROSS CLASS	KEY ABILITY	MODIFIERS TOTAL	ABILITY	RANKS	MISC
APPRAISE ✓	Y / N	INT				
BALANCE ✓	Y / N	DEX *				
BLUFF ✓	Y / N	CHA				
CLIMB ✓	Y / N	STR *				
CONCENTRATION ✓	Y / N	CON				
CRAFT ✓ ( )	Y / N	INT				
CRAFT ✓ ( )	Y / N	INT				
CRAFT ✓ ( )	Y / N	INT				
CRAFT ✓ ( )	Y / N	INT				
DECIPHER SCRIPT	Y / N	INT				
DIPLOMACY✓	Y / N	CHA				
DISABLE DEVICE	Y / N	INT				
DISGUISE ✓	Y / N	CHA				
ESCAPE ARTIST ✓	Y / N	DEX *				
FORGERY ✓	Y / N	INT				
GATHER INFORMATION ✓	Y / N	CHA				
HANDLE ANIMAL	Y / N	CHA				
HEAL ✓	Y / N	WIS				
HIDE ✓	Y / N	DEX *				
INTIMIDATE ✓	Y / N	CHA				
JUMP ✓	Y / N	STR*				
KNOWLEDGE ( )	Y / N	INT				
KNOWLEDGE ( )	Y / N	INT				
KNOWLEDGE ( )	Y / N	INT				
KNOWLEDGE ( )	Y / N	INT				
LISTEN ✓	Y / N	WIS				
MOVE SILENTLY	Y / N	DEX*				
OPEN LOCK	Y / N	DEX				
PERFORM ( )	Y / N	CHA				
PROFESSION ( )	Y / N	WIS				
PROFESSION ( )	Y / N	WIS				
PROFESSION ( )	Y / N	INT				
RIDE ✓	Y / N	DEX				
SEARCH ✓	Y / N	INT				
SENSE MOTIVE ✓	Y / N	WIS				
SLEIGHT OF HAND	Y / N	DEX				
SPELLCRAFT	Y / N	INT				
SPOT ✓	Y / N	WIS				
SWIM ✓	Y / N	STR**				
SURVIVAL ✓	Y / N	WIS				
TUMBLE	Y / N	DEX*				
USE MAGIC DEVICE	Y / N	CHA				
USE ROPE ✓	Y / N	DEX				
	Y / N					
	Y / N					
	Y / N					
	Y / N					

✓ CAN BE USED WITH 0 RANKS, * ARMOUR CHECK PENALTY APPLIES, ★ X2 ARMOUR CHECK PENALTY APPLIES

EQUIPMENT

CURRENT LOAD	TOTAL WEIGHT CARRIED	

FEATS

CLASS/RACIAL ABILITIES

LANGUAGES

MONEY & GEMS

CP -
SP -
GP -
PP -
GEMS -

SPELLS

EXPERIENCE

TOTAL EXPERIENCE

XPS NEEDED FOR NEXT LEVEL

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The Drow War

BOOK THREE

The Darkest Hour

The Adventure Reaches Its Climax!

The Drow War: Book III - The Darkest Hour begins on the world of Ashfar, where a peace forged in blood has been bitterly broken. Something is causing the barriers between worlds to collapse, smashing plane into plane, opening rifts through which atrocious fiends can step into the ordinary world and cause chaos. Even former enemies recognise the threat. Is it written in the heavens that the Starborn and the drow must always be opposed or can the dark ones truly change? Can the olive branch be accepted or is this just another trick?

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